

# COMMUNIO

**a theological journal founded in 1958**

Published by the Protestant Theological Faculty  
of Charles University in Prague

**Editors:** Mark Douglas (Decatur, Ga), Marianne Grohmann (Wien), Michael  
Kírwán SJ (London), Katharina Kunter (Karlsruhe), Dirk G. Lange (Saint Paul,  
MN), Tim Noble (Praha)

**Editor-in-chief:** Petr Sláma (Praha)

Articles, book-reviews, questions and comments  
should be addressed to the editors: [cv@etf.cuni.cz](mailto:cv@etf.cuni.cz)

Cheques, orders, subscriptions and all business correspondence should be  
addressed to the journal's administration: [cv-adm@etf.cuni.cz](mailto:cv-adm@etf.cuni.cz)

Pavel Moskala

Univerzita Karlova, Evangelická teologická fakulta

Communio viatorum

Černá 9, P. O. Box 529, CZ-115 55 Praha 1, Czech Republic

Phone: +420 221 988 418 (Petr Sláma) Fax: +420 221 988 215

URL: <http://www.etf.cuni.cz/cv-1.html>

**Annual subscription** (for three issues): 54 € or the equivalent  
single copy: 18 €

Please make the payment to our account to:

Bank name: Komerční banka

Bank address: Komerční banka

Spálená 51

110 00 Praha 1

Czech Republic

Bank identification code: SWIFT (BIC): KOMBCZPPXXX

IBAN (International Bank Account Number): CZ450100000511087550287

Account no.: 51-1087550287/0100

Account name: Univerzita Karlova

Evangelická teologická fakulta

Černá 9, P. O. BOX 529

115 55 Praha 1

Czech Republic

Subscriptions will be renewed automatically every year unless canceled by  
January 1st of the year in question.

Typography: Petr Kadlec. Printed by OFTIS Ústí nad Orlicí.

# VIATORUM

## CONTENTS (LX, 2018) Nr. 3

- 235 . . . . . IVANA NOBLE  
Each Epoch Has Its Own Scenery
- 239 . . . . . JAMES H. CHARLESWORTH  
“Archaeologically Enriched Theology” and the Historical Jesus:  
Challenging Advances in Scientific Research
- 252 . . . . . DÁVID CIELONTKO  
The Daughters of Men in the Book of Watchers
- 276 . . . . . ŠTĚPÁN LISÝ  
Theoretical Approaches in the Study of Jewish Mysticism: New  
Perspective
- 313 . . . . . PAVOL BARGÁR  
“I felt it... It was perfect”: Apollo, Dionysus, Christ, and *Black Swan*
- BOOK AND FILM REVIEWS:**
- 334 . . . Tim Noble, *Latin American Theology: Roots and Branches*  
(Maria Clara L. Bingemer)

## THEORETICAL APPROACHES IN THE STUDY OF JEWISH MYSTICISM: NEW PERSPECTIVE

Štěpán Lisý, Pardubice

### Introduction

The aim of the submitted study is to analyse the theoretical approaches in the study of Jewish mysticism. In the theoretical discussion of mysticism, we will see that the earliest scholars assumed that the phenomenon of mysticism is common to people of all cultures and can be identified as a union with God. An approach where researchers assume the existence of a common mystical "core" present in all religions and cultures is called *essential*. Union with God has become an assessment criterion, according to which individual scholars are able to assess whether a reviewed phenomenon under is mystical. This assumption is not a result of modern research, but we find it as early as with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola or Sir William Jones.

Later researchers criticize the above mentioned assumption and argue that, for instance, mystics in India do not express their experience as a union with God. For this reason, the unification model proved to be unsuitable particularly for Asian traditions. Based on these findings, scientists have tried to distinguish different types of mysticism into categories according to identical characteristics. While the category comprising union with God in Judaism, Christianity and Islam proved to be relatively stable, the other categories were variable and difficult to apply. Most of these interpretations are based on the assumption of universal occurrence of the phenomenon of mysticism. Researchers, in line with this assumption, suggest a number of features that particular examples should share in order to be considered mystical. Each such researcher states an original number of features and it often proves that not all the features are present with each phenomenon, although it is considered mystical.

Problems with the categorization of mysticism disappeared in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century when researchers came to the conclusion that there is no unconditional mystical experience, but each experience is determined by the nature of man, religion, culture, and history. The result is the notion that with each mystic we encounter an original expression of mystical experience that is common to all people of all religions and cultures, and any comparison is no longer possible. This approach is referred to by some scientists as *contextual*. In both approaches, the scholars share the idea of universal mysticism, which significantly determines the nature of research in the discussed discipline.

In publications dealing with mysticism, we often find detailed descriptions such as experience, vision or techniques that researchers consider mystical, however, it is not always clear on what criteria the selected examples were assessed. Boaz Huss pointed out that the only link that helps modern scholars to study the phenomenon of mysticism in different cultures is the assumption of universal occurrence of the phenomenon of mysticism. Huss states that this reason itself is sufficient enough to abandon the category of *mysticism* altogether, as it represents a specific theological position.<sup>1</sup> In an article, symptomatically called *Theologies of Kabbalah Research*, Huss demonstrates that most researchers in this discipline assume that a phenomenon referred to as "mystical" is almost always a result of a human encounter with God or a transcendental reality.<sup>2</sup> It is clear from Huss's research that he was inspired by a theoretical debate in the study of religion, in which some scholars indicate that the category of religion is *not* universal, but can be a construct of scientists<sup>3</sup>, and admit that there can be cultures *without* religion.<sup>4</sup> S. N. Balagangadhara goes even further and claims that the idea of cultural universality of religion has "more to do with

<sup>1</sup> Jewish Mysticism in the University, Academic Study or Theological Practice?', *Zeek (Ben Gurion University Review)*, translation Elana Lutsky, 2007, online URL: <http://www.zeek.net/712academy/> [cit. 12. 1. 2017].

<sup>2</sup> Boaz Huss, "The Theologies of Kabbalah Research", *Modern Judaism* 34/1 (2014), 18–19.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, n. 4. Also Boaz Huss, "Spirituality: The Emergence of a New Cultural Category and its Challenges to the Religious and the Secular", *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29/1 (2014), 52.

<sup>4</sup> Frits Staal, *Rules without Meaning: Ritual, Mantras, and the Human Sciences*, New York: Peter Lang, 1989; Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Western culture than with what human cultures are"<sup>5</sup>. The validity of that conclusion will be tested in the following analysis.

This study demonstrates that the problem in the study of mysticism lies not in the category but, in particular, in the *assumption* that is associated with the category of "mysticism" in the research. As a solution, I propose to first investigate the existence of the phenomenon of mysticism, or, in other words, to provide an answer to the question of what makes any phenomenon a mystical phenomenon. Only when an answer to this question is available, it will be possible to test the validity of the theological position and possibly limit the use of the category of "mysticism" to selected religions or cultures in the same way, as, for instance, in the history of astronomy, the Sun was excluded from the category "planet".

### Paradigm Shift in the Study of Mysticism?

Scientists in natural sciences, as well as in some humanities, speak of paradigmatic research. These researchers confirm Kuhn's assumption that his view of science can be beneficial not only for astronomy, physics and chemistry, but also for historical and socio-scientific research.<sup>6</sup> If we focus on the humanities only, we find that when applying Kuhn's theory of science, some scholars doubt its usefulness, for instance in the study of Bible or history.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, there are disciplines in the humanities where the paradigm shift is being discussed. Such disciplines include the study of mysticism. Jess B. Hollenback talks about the paradigmatic shift, i.e. the transition from essential to contextual research of mysticism.<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Garb goes even fur-

<sup>5</sup> S. N. Balagandhara, "The Heathen in His Blindness...": *Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2013), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), xi.

<sup>7</sup> Robert F. Shedinger, "Kuhnian Paradigms and Biblical Scholarship: Is Biblical Studies a Science?", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 119/3 (2000), 466; David A. Hollinger, "T. S. Kuhn's Theory of Science and Its Implications for History" *The American Historical Review* 78/2 (1973), 393.

<sup>8</sup> Jess Byron Hollenback, *Mysticism: Experience, Response and Empowerment*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996, 11–12.

ther and considers Hollenback's extensive study a true paradigm.<sup>9</sup> It is worth mentioning that Hollenback's study was recommended to Garb by Moshe Idel.<sup>10</sup> In the study of Jewish mysticism, Philip S. Alexander speaks of Scholem's paradigm, which, although shaken in his foundations by the research of Moshe Idel, remains a determining paradigm for the study of Jewish mysticism.<sup>11</sup> A recent study by Peter Schäfer, a critic of the essentialist approach of Moshe Idel and Boaz Huss, also builds on Scholem's research.<sup>12</sup> However, Schäfer is also heavily influenced by the contextual approach popularized by Steven T. Katz.<sup>13</sup>

Although some of the above-mentioned researchers talk about a paradigm shift, the present study will show that there is no such change in the discipline reviewed. This discipline is still in the pre-paradigmatic period, which is demonstrated, for instance, by the absence of a pre-established theory. Although the discipline is in the pre-scientific period, we can observe that members of the analysed scientific group share elements that can be termed paradigm. Because, according to Kuhn, "What changes with the transition to maturity is not the presence of a paradigm but its nature."<sup>14</sup> Scientists in this discipline collect and interpret facts about the phenomenon of mysticism based on the same assumption. To this end, they use simple tools to identify the phenomenon of mysticism not only within the framework of Judaism but also in other religions and cultures. The aim of the present study is to analyse the nature of the paradigm in the pre-paradigm period in the scientific discipline of studying Jewish mysticism. Although I will

<sup>9</sup> Yoni Garb, "Review Article: Path of Power", *The Journal of Religion* 78/4 (1998), 595, n. 8.

<sup>10</sup> "My thanks to Professor Moshe Idel for bringing my attention to Hollenback's *Mysticism* in the course of a seminar at Shalom Hartman Institute [...]" *Ibid.*, 593, n. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Philip S. Alexander, "Mysticism", in: *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. by Martin Goodman, ass. eds. Jeremy Cohen and David Sorkin, New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 729.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton / Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011, 17, 354.

<sup>13</sup> "The position adopted by Katz is not an original one. I find it, as early as 1909, clearly expressed in Rufus Jones [...]" Philip Almond, "Mysticism and Its Contexts", in: *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. by Robert K. C. Forman, New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, 40–41.

<sup>14</sup> Kuhn, *The Structure*, 179.

give examples predominantly from this discipline, the presented analysis may also be beneficial for related disciplines.

According to Kuhn, in order for the first paradigm to emerge, a scientific discipline must have a pre-established theory: "Only very occasionally, as in the cases of ancient statics, dynamics, and geometrical optics, into facts collected with so little guidance from pre-established theory speak with sufficient clarity to allow the emergence of a first paradigm."<sup>15</sup> Paradigmatic research is therefore characterized by the application of a pre-established theory helping researchers in one or another discipline to gather relevant facts and interpret them. Kuhn basically says that if a discipline has a pre-established theory, data collection is not just a random activity, and not all the data seem to be equally significant.<sup>16</sup> The aforementioned group of researchers has no pre-established theory, but it derives various interpretations of the gathered facts with a *preconceived point of view*<sup>17</sup> without realizing that this assumption considerably determines the nature and results of research. Research of this type can be described as inductivist.<sup>18</sup> From this context, it is clear that our next step will be to analyse the preconceived points of view entering the research as well as the method of data collection and interpretation of facts with important members of the science community researching mysticism. The analysis comprises not only Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah), but also research of mysticism which scholars in the study of Jewish mysticism build on. Prominent representatives of the discipline, many of whom talk about the paradigmatic shift, were selected for the study. I realize that other scholars could come up with a different list of authors of equal prominence, however, but this fact cannot affect the conclusions of the submitted study.

First of all, we will mention Gershom G. Scholem, the founder of the academic study of Jewish mysticism. In his research, Scholem assumes that the phenomenon common to all Jewish and non-Jewish

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>17</sup> See Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 2, London: Routledge, 1947, 253f.

<sup>18</sup> See Karl R. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, London / New York: Routledge, 2002, 3ff.

mystics is not a union with God, but a mystical (ecstatic)<sup>19</sup> experience that is always inseparably linked to a particular religion, and mystics are its faithful followers. In this respect, this builds upon the research of Evelyn Underhill.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, he gathers facts about mystical experience from different historical periods of the development of Judaism and attempts to interpret them in such a way that the interpretation is always in line with the above mentioned assumption. He uses the historical-philological method and he calls his interpretation of facts *generalization*.<sup>21</sup> He does not use any pre-established theory, but assumes that the facts are theoretically *neutral* without realizing that they are linked and interpreted with the assumption of universal occurrence of the studied phenomenon. He differs from their predecessors only in gathering a larger class of facts, particularly those facts his predecessors paid *little attention* to.<sup>22</sup>

Steven T. Katz, although not a researcher dealing exclusively with Jewish mysticism, significantly influenced the research of the discipline by his contextual approach. In his study, he claims that his *pluralistic account* enables to explain all the facts explained by *non-pluralistic* accounts since he approaches them in a new way. He does not assume, as essentialists do, that all mystical experiences are the same or similar, but that they are always *culturally and ideologically grounded*. In accordance with this premise, he collects facts from different religions and cultures, and subsequently tries to draw a sat-

<sup>19</sup> "Numerous mystics, Jews as well non-Jews, have by no means represented the essence of their ecstatic experience, the tremendous uprush and soaring of the soul to its highest plane, as a union with God." Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York: Schocken Books, 1995, 5.

<sup>20</sup> "[...] there is no such thing as mysticism in the abstract [...] there is only the mysticism of a particular religious system, [...]. That there remains a common characteristic it would be absurd to deny [...]" Ibid., 5-6. "[...] Evelyn Underhill has rightly pointed out, the prevailing conception of the mystic as a religious anarchist who owes no allegiance to his religion finds little support in fact. *History rather shows that the great mystics were faithful adherents of the great religions.*" Ibid., 6. Emphasis mine.

<sup>21</sup> "Both as to historical fact and philological analysis there was pioneer work to be done, often of the most primitive and elementary kind. Rapid bird s-eye syntheses and elaborate speculations on shaky premises had to give way to the more modest work of laying the secure foundations of valid generalization." Ibid., xxv.

<sup>22</sup> "[...] in the main I shall confine myself to the analysis of writings to which little attention has hitherto been given in the literature on Jewish religious history." Ibid., 40.

isfactory generalised interpretation.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, Katz does not use a pre-established theory, however, he interprets available facts that he considers being theoretically *neutral*, even though they are selected and interpreted with the assumption of universal occurrence of the studied phenomenon.

Moshe Idel works in a similar way, although, unlike Scholem, he assumes that the common phenomenon of Jewish and non-Jewish mystics is *unio mystica*.<sup>24</sup> In accordance with this assumption, he collects the facts and subsequently deduces his own interpretation. In the research, he prefers being led by the problems presented in the studied texts rather than to interpret them by means of a particular selected method. He seeks to combine the phenomenological and historical approach.<sup>25</sup> However, even Idel does not use a pre-

<sup>23</sup> "Our primary aim has been to mark out a new way of approaching the data, concentrating especially on disabusing scholars of the preconceived notion that all mystical experience is the same or similar. [...] Our sole concern has been to try and see, recognizing the contextuality, what the mystical evidence will allow in the way of legitimate philosophical reflection. Our investigation suggests what it suggests – a wide variety of mystical experiences which are, at least in respect of some determinative aspects, culturally and ideologically grounded. Yet having argued for this position, we are aware that two things have to continue to be done: (1) further careful, expert, study of specific mystical traditions has to be undertaken to uncover what their characteristics are and especially how they relate to the larger theological milieu out of which they emerge; and (2) further fundamental epistemological research into the conditions of mystical experience has to be undertaken in order to lay bare the skeleton of such experience in so far as this is possible. This latter enterprise is especially important and, yet, is all the more neglected. One final word about the use of the available evidence and the construction of a theory to account for it. A strong supporting element in favour of our pluralistic account is found in the fact that our position is able to accommodate all the evidence which is accounted for by non-pluralistic accounts without being reductionistic, i.e. it is able to do more justice to the specificity of the evidence and its inherent distinctions and disjunctions than can the alternative approaches." Steven T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism", in: *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. by Steven T. Katz, New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, 66.

<sup>24</sup> "I shall propose an alternative view on expressions of *unio mystica* in Kabbalah: far from being absent, unitive descriptions recur in Kabbalistic literature no less frequently than in non-Jewish mystical writings, and the images used by the Kabbalists do not fall short of the most extreme forms of other types of mysticism." Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 1988, 59–60.

<sup>25</sup> "My approach therefore combines phenomenology with history, thereby avoiding 'pure' phenomenological descriptions. The juxtaposition of these two methods does not lie in their unique 'deviation' from adherence to a single approach; by and large, I have tried to solve problems emerging from the texts, while using various approaches

established theory, but assumes, just as his predecessors, that the facts are theoretically *neutral*, even though they are collected and interpreted with the assumption of universal occurrence of the studied phenomenon. He differs from the other researchers only by taking into account facts that were previously neglected.<sup>26</sup>

Jess B. Hollenback assumes that the phenomenon common to all mystics in different cultures and religious traditions is the "empowerment" of mystical imagination, thoughts, emotions, and volitions.<sup>27</sup> In accordance with this, he gathers a plethora of facts from different tribes, cultures, religious traditions, including paranormal phenomena, and thus distinguishes himself from his predecessors who consciously omitted certain facts or assigned a little value to them.<sup>28</sup> Hollenback also considers the collected facts to be theoretically *neutral* without realizing that they are collected and interpreted with the assumption of universal occurrence of the studied phenomenon. According to Jonathan Garb, the significance of Hollenback's research lies not only in the quantitative expansion of the existing class of facts, but, in particular, in the comparison of literary and non-literary mystics, as this comparison enables a better critique of the contemporary the-

that may propose solutions. From this point of view, I am rather pragmatist, allowing myself to be directed by the problems generated by the texts rather than attempting to superimpose one method upon all analyses." *Ibid.*, xix.

<sup>26</sup> "The structure of this work consists of the exposition of two mystical concerns of the Kabbalists. [...] theurgical and theosophical aspects of the Kabbalah are the subjects of the next three chapters. In two of these chapters, I focus upon issues representing the extremes of the ecstatic and theurgical trends of Kabbalah: chapter 4 treats of written evidence of extreme descriptions of unitive experiences [...]; chapter 8 discusses some rather daring views of theurgy that surpass the more common views of this type of Kabbalistic activity. These two extreme phenomena been neglected by modern scholarship [...]. I should like to emphasize that the phenomena treated in chapters 4 and 8 are not merely marginal or bizarre but part of an inner development of the particular Kabbalistic trends they represent [...]" *Ibid.*, xix–xx.

<sup>27</sup> "[...] this book contains a lengthy analysis of a common but largely ignored accompaniment of recollective practice and mystical experience, a phenomenon that I have called the 'empowerment' of a mystic's imagination, thoughts, emotions, and volitions. [...] The cross-cultural persistence of empowerment is demonstrated here and shown to play a significant role in constructing the perceptual and existential environments within which mystics dwell during their visions, ecstasies, and journeys to the spiritual world." Hollenback, *Mysticism*, vii.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, viii–ix.

oretical approaches,<sup>29</sup> i.e. the essentialist and contextual approach. Contrary, Hollenback brings a *unique synthesis* of both approaches that, according to Garb, could become a *new paradigm* in the study of mysticism.<sup>30</sup>

Peter Schäfer assumes that union with God is definitely not the goal of *all* Jewish and non-Jewish mystics;<sup>31</sup> on the contrary, the mystical phenomena are very diverse and cannot be subsumed into a single all-embracing category.<sup>32</sup> In accordance with this, he gathered relevant

<sup>29</sup> "Hollenback provides a greater sense of openness to the full array of mystical texts and phenomena, including the spirituality of the Far East and that of tribal/Shamanistic societies (Native Australian, Native American, Inuit Eskimo, etc.). The importance of this direction does not lie merely in a quantitative expansion of the existing material but mainly in the fact that it enables a powerful critique of the existing theoretical approaches in the field. The classical theoretical discussions alluded to above were mainly founded on Christian Mysticism, and even contemporary discussions mainly focus on the Western traditions (including Judaism and Islam) as well as – to a lesser degree – major religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. When one replaces this limitation with a more multicultural approach, then the focus of investigation shifts from philosophic and linguistic concerns of more literate cultures to the more experiential *Sitz-in-Leben* of nonliterate societies. As Hollenback shows, the mystic of a literate tradition such as Kabbalah or Sufism should be studied in tandem with the shaman in a nonliterate society such as the Iglulik Eskimos. This comparison can enable a substantial reappraisal of the nature and role of the former's experience [...]. Yet a further extension of the material encompassed by studies of mysticism is reflected in Hollenback's readiness to consider the evidence of contemporary mystical practitioners involved in techniques such as astral projection, telepathy, and reading of auras. This material, which had been previously ignored or devalued by scholars, is fruitfully compared to the more respectable testimonies of well known mystics such as Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi or Saint John of the Cross." Garb, "Review Article: Path of Power", 594–595.

<sup>30</sup> "Hollenback proposes an unique synthesis of the two approaches. In my opinion, this synthesis is powerful enough to become the new paradigm in the study of mysticism." *Ibid.*, 595.

<sup>31</sup> "Some scholars even go so far as to boldly proclaim, 'That we bear the image of God is the starting-point, one might almost say the postulate, of all Mysticism. The complete union with God is the goal of all Mysticism.' There is, however, one problem with this definition. Whether or not it fits a religion such as Judaism we will see, but what about religions that do not presuppose the existence of a transcendent God and the human soul, that is, religions that are not based on Hebrew Bible with its notion of human beings 'in the image and likeness of God'? Hindu and Buddhist mysticism, for example, suggest that the world and nature are illusions and that the deepest and truest 'unity' is achieved when awareness of the self and its connection with the world is annihilated, thus interrupting the fatal cycle of reincarnation. This kind of mysticism is called 'acosmic' or 'world-negating.'" Schäfer, *The Origins*, 3–4.

<sup>32</sup> "As to be expected, it turns out that the phenomena collected and described under the headings 'Ezekiel,' 'Ascent Apokalyses,' 'Qumran,' 'Philo,' 'The Rabbis,' and

facts not only from Jewish but also from other religious traditions, which he subsequently interprets. He admits that he alone decided which texts should be included in the historical-philological analysis. However, selected texts representing a community should speak for themselves, to inform us what a particular group considers important and what terms they use. Schäfer also notes that there is no other solution that would allow us to avoid pre-established definition of mysticism.<sup>33</sup> Similarly to other above mentioned scholars, Schäfer does not use a pre-established theory, but rather, as his predecessors did, he considers the facts to be theoretically *neutral* without realizing that they are collected and interpreted with the assumption of the universal occurrence of the mystic phenomenon.

The only exception among the scholars here is Boaz Huss. Huss talks of *theological position*, which dominates the entire discipline.<sup>34</sup> According to Huss, the solution is a non-theological study of Kabbalah and

'Merkavah Mystics,' are greatly diverse and resist the modern scholar's desire to subsume them under a single all-embracing category." *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>33</sup> "[...] I start with the assumption that it is our task to allow each set of texts and each community represented by certain texts to speak for themselves, to tell us, what it is they find important and wish to emphasize. [...] it is I alone who has decided which texts representing certain authors or communities to include in my inquiry. [...] I have not attempted to reinvent the wheel but rely entirely on the corpus of texts that has emerged in a long tradition of previous scholarship. [...] In analyzing certain core texts I attempt to capture and describe the 'toponymy' and nomenclature of these texts on their own terms, but of course always with an eye to what they may or may not contribute to the question of 'mysticism'. I am aware of the vicious circle that such a pointedly pragmatic approach entails, but I believe there exists no other or better solution that at the same time avoids the risk of imposing a preconceived definition on the texts. [...] Taking the texts as my starting point, I am interested in methods that are most suitable not just for solving textual problems but also for bringing out what the texts themselves seek to convey. Accordingly, methods that do justice to the linguistic and historical parameters of a given text still seem to me most appropriate, and I am not afraid of resorting to the allegedly old-fashioned and outdated historical-critical method – a method that, in the post-Scholem era, serves as a scapegoat for almost everything that (supposedly) went wrong with Scholem's approach." *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>34</sup> "[...] the problem with using the category 'mysticism' in scientific study is not only that it is opposed to the perception of the subjects of the research, but also that it puts together many different cultural formations, which have no connection other than scholars' assumption that behind them lies a common, universal phenomenon. This is already sufficient reason to avoid using the category 'mysticism' in academic scholarship. However, even beyond the fact that the term is an inappropriate essentialist term, there is also a third problem: that the very use of it supports a particular theological position." Huss, "Jewish Mysticism in the University".

Hassidism that would capture both of these phenomena as an integral part of the historical, social, and political structure, and not as a part of theology, i.e. a metaphysical expression common to the people of all religions and cultures. Therefore, according to Huss, Kabbalah and Hassidism should be demystified, and *Jewish mysticism* as a fundamental category of the whole discipline should be abandoned altogether.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, we can state that a predominant part of prominent members of the surveyed scientific community carry out their research in the same way.<sup>36</sup> The discipline has no *pre-established theory*,<sup>37</sup> so, according to Kuhn, the first paradigm can arise only with difficulty. The surveyed group of researchers share the opinion that the collected facts are theoretically *neutral* without realizing that the facts are *collected* and *interpreted* with the assumption of universal occurrence of the phenomenon of mysticism. Almost all of the scholars are convinced that the unifying theological position, pointed out by Huss, is valid without being tested. Individual scholars present an original, generalized explanation of the phenomenon of mysticism, which is directly dependent on the amount of facts gathered about the studied phenomenon. As a result, almost each of them has its own definition of mysticism or an original list of characteristics that enable to distinguish

<sup>35</sup> Huss, "The Theologies of Kabbalah Research", 17–19. Comp.: "[...] a term such as mysticism is itself subject to debate and confusion, which has led some leading scholars of Sufism to reject the word mysticism altogether as a description of Sufism." Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, Boston / London: Shambhala, 1997, xvii.

<sup>36</sup> Obviously, many prominent authors are missing from the list, e.g. Jehuda Liebes, "New Directions in Kabbalah Studies [Kivunim chadashim bechekar ha-kabbala]", *Pe'amim* 50 (1992), 150–170 [Hebrew]; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, 5–11; Moshe Hallamish, *Kabbalah in Liturgy, Halakhah and Customs*, Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002, 10 [Hebrew]; Rachel Elijor, *Jewish Mysticism: The Infinite Expression of Freedom*, Portland: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007, 12–18; Joseph Dan, *History of Jewish Mysticism and Esotericism: Ancient Times*, Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2008, 35–38 [Hebrew]; Daniel Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts and Textual Theory: Methodologies of Textual Scholarship and Editorial Practice in the Study of Jewish Mysticism*, Jerusalem / Los Angeles: Magnes Press, 2010, 3–4.

<sup>37</sup> Although Joseph Dan refers to Popper's chapter discussing this issue, it does not have an impact on the character of his research. Dan, *History of Jewish Mysticism*, 36, n. 11.

the phenomenon of mysticism from other phenomena.<sup>38</sup> Most of these interpretations are based on a theological position. Researchers, in line with this assumption, propose a number of features that examples should have in common in order to be considered mystical. However, from many researches it is not clear how individual researchers attained their features. A researcher usually states the original number of features, and often it turns out that a particular phenomenon does not display all the features, even though it is still considered mystical.<sup>39</sup> The question arises as to whether theories are merely interpretations of facts gathered:

Are theories simply man-made interpretations of given data? The epistemological viewpoint that has most often guided western philosophy for three centuries dictates an immediate and unequivocal, Yes! In the absence of a developed alternative, I find it impossible to relinquish entirely that viewpoint. Yet it no longer functions effectively, and the attempts to make it do so through the introduction of a neutral language of observations now seem to me hopeless. [...] Far more clearly than the immediate experience from which they in part derive, operations and measurements are paradigm-determined. Science does not deal in all possible laboratory manipulations. Instead, it selects those relevant to the juxtaposition of a paradigm with the immediate experience that that paradigm has partially determined.<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, researchers of mysticism do not deal with all available texts, case studies, and field research results, but they choose those that are significant for comparison with the immediate experience that the paradigm has already partially determined.<sup>41</sup> Kuhn holds the opposite view that *facts are not theoretically neutral*, but they are determined

<sup>38</sup> Elijor, *Jewish Mysticism*, p. 2, n. 1; p. 3, n. 3.

<sup>39</sup> See Hollenback, *Mysticism*, 34, 41. Comp. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, London, Bombay: Longmans, Green, 1903, 379–380.

<sup>40</sup> Kuhn, *The Structure*, 126.

<sup>41</sup> I realize that many critics deprecate Kuhn, for instance, for an unclear definition of the paradigm, yet he provides an example, the Copernican Revolution, which he consistently uses to explain paradigm shift as a change of the conceptual framework. See *Ibid.*, 128–129. Compare with Kuhn's later reflection. Thomas S. Kuhn, "The Road Since Structure", *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association*, Vol. 2, "Symposia and Invited Papers", 1990, 5.

by a paradigm of one or another discipline. He also remarks: "The members of all scientific communities, including the schools of the 'pre-paradigm' period, share the sorts of elements that I have collectively labelled 'a paradigm'. What changes with the transition to maturity is not the presence of a paradigm but rather its nature."<sup>42</sup> It should be emphasized here that Kuhn admits the different nature of the paradigm in scientific discipline in the pre-paradigmatic period as compared to the paradigm of advanced disciplines. Simply put, according to Kuhn, at various stages of a discipline development, the scientific community shares a common paradigm, the existence of which individual members may not always be fully aware of. Based on the above-mentioned observations, it seems likely that the analysed discipline is in the pre-paradigmatic period and that almost all of the studied scientific community shares a unifying paradigm in the form of a theological position.

### The Nature of Normal Science in the Study of Mysticism

According to Kuhn, the practice of normal science depends on "the ability, acquired from exemplars, to group objects and situations into similarity sets which are primitive in the sense that the grouping is done without an answer to the question, 'Similar with respect to what?'"<sup>43</sup> On another occasion, Kuhn adds that accepted examples of scientific practice include law, theory, and application, which provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research.<sup>44</sup> The practice of normal science also takes place in the study of mysticism, but in comparison to advanced scientific disciplines it has a different *nature*. In the studied discipline, we cannot talk about the use of *exemplars* in Kuhn's sense. Although I will continue to talk about the use of examples in this discipline, it should always be remembered that these are not *exemplars* of advanced science described by Kuhn. Nonetheless, with the selected members of the surveyed scientific community, it is possible to identify simple tools, which represent a way to

<sup>42</sup> Kuhn, *The Structure*, 179.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

predict and identify the studied phenomenon in new research areas. The described scientific practice is valid for the entire research tradition, in which each concept of Jewish mysticism is a generalizing interpretation of the currently available facts, based on the same assumption. The aim of anticipating and identifying the observed phenomenon in new areas of research is to always achieve greater precision, which in this case means achieving a *better* match of the unifying theological position with reality.

The following parts will illustrate that researchers are united in using common examples. These examples serve them as tools that inform them of the similarities that they should seek in new areas of research. Applying these examples to new areas helps scientists to identify the phenomenon of mysticism not only in various historical stages of Judaism, but also in other religions and cultures. The examples are characterized by their vocabulary and are always associated with the assumption of the universal occurrence of the phenomenon of mysticism. This assumption is based on the theological conceptual framework characteristic of Christian thinking. This assumption enables application of individual examples, as well as the conceptual framework, to new areas of research without requiring individual researchers to carry out research on the existence of the studied phenomenon. The next part of this text will focus on one example only – *union with God*.

### Identification of the Union with God by Pico della Mirandola

Contemporary mystical scholars agree that the comparative study of mysticism as a discipline occurs at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>45</sup> However, the first theoretical discussion of mysticism comes exclusively from Christian theologians.<sup>46</sup> Bernard McGinn gives two reasons. Firstly, rich vocabulary concerning union with God both in Latin and old European languages developed in the Middle Ages; second, an extensive polemical discussion over the various types of union took

<sup>45</sup> Dan Merkur, *Mystical Moments and Unitive Thinking*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1999, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Garb, "Review Article: Path of Power", 594.



place at the same time.<sup>47</sup> In the Middle Ages, however, we do not see Christian scholars identifying the phenomenon of union with God in non-Christian religious traditions and attempting a comparison. Perhaps one of the first attempts is found with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494). But let us look at the context in which Pico talks about union with God:

Oh unsurpassed of generosity of God, Oh wondrous and unsurpassable felicity of man, to it is granted to have what he chooses, to be what he wills to be! The brutes, from the moment of their birth, bring with them, as Lucilius says, "from their mother's womb" all that they will ever possess. The highest spiritual beings were, from the very moment of creation, or soon thereafter, fixed in the mode of being which would be theirs through measureless eternities. But upon man, at the moment of his creation, God bestowed seeds pregnant with all possibilities, the germs of every form of life. Whichever of these a man shall cultivate, the same will mature and bear fruit in him. If vegetative, he will become a plant; if sensual, he will become brutish; if rational, he will reveal himself a heavenly being; if intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God. And if, dissatisfied with the lot of all creatures, he should recollect himself into the center of his own unity, he will there, become one spirit with God (*unus cum Deo spiritus factus*), in the solitary darkness of the Father, Who is set above all things, himself transcend all creatures.<sup>48</sup>

According to Pico, the ability to unite with God is something given from God. Thus, man naturally longs for God, to be united with him. Whether this ability is used in one's life and the union is achieved, depends entirely on the individual's free will. In describing the ultimate goal, Pico assumes the "existence" of a transcendent God in the role of the Creator of all the world "standing" outside the created world. God's will, which is the cause of all creation, is constantly manifested in the nature and history of all mankind. The act of creation affects every person, thus the ability to unite with God is common to people

<sup>47</sup> Bernard McGinn, "Comments", in: Moshe Idel – Bernard McGinn (eds.), *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith*, New York: Macmillan 1989, 185.

<sup>48</sup> Latin text from Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Discorso sulla dignità dell'uomo*, Brescia: Ereditrice La Scuola, 1987, fol. 132v. English translation from G. Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Chicago: Great Books Foundation, 1956, 8–9.

of all religions. In keeping with this assumption, Pico examines the writings of contemporary philosophical traditions dealing with divine wonders i.e. nature, including secret Jewish teaching hidden in Kabbalistic writings, which he considers to be the most reliable philosophy of nature.<sup>49</sup> In another place, he adds: "Nothing contributes to religion (*ad religionem*) and worship of God (*ad Dei cultum*) as much as a ceaseless contemplation of divine wonders."<sup>50</sup> After Pico had acquired, for a considerable price, Kabbalistic writings and studied them, he says: "I have seen in them religion more Christian than Jewish (*vidi in illis religionem non tam Mosaicam quam Christianam*)."<sup>51</sup> He claims that the authors of these books hold the same doctrine as many Christian scholars. Both groups concur, for instance, in the doctrine of the Trinity, the incarnation of the Word, the Messiah, and so forth. He lists Paul the Apostle, Dionysius, Jerome, and Augustine. As for their "philosophical" content, a reader feels like reading Pythagoras or Plato.<sup>52</sup> According to Pico, all the traditions of thought contain ancient theology (*prisca theologia*), which is the same or very close to Christian teaching, however, he admits that in each of them union with God is denoted under different nomenclatures.<sup>53</sup> In other words, according to Pico, all contemporary religions or traditions of thought strive for the sole purpose of union with God, as Christianity does. Also Stephan Farmer describes Pico's efforts using similar words.<sup>54</sup>

The key question remains how Pico came to the conclusion that all philosophical and intellectual traditions pursue the same goal of union

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 138r.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 138v–139r.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 70–71, fol. 134r; 74–75, fol. 134r. Comp.: "One topic central to the understanding of Kabbalah in this period, which preoccupied many Renaissance scholars, was the concept of *prisca theologia*, the belief in the existence of an "ancient theology" whose basic tenets manifested themselves in various religious and philosophical doctrines under different nomenclatures." Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy, 1280–1510: a survey*, New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 2011, 164–165.

<sup>54</sup> "[...] all ancient wisemen believed that philosophy provided a necessary propaedeutic to the mystical ascent." Stephan A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486). The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems* (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, vol. 167), Tempe: ACMRS, 2008, 51. Also: "[...] man's 'greatest happiness' is achieved only when the participated unity of the soul is fully absorbed into the absolute unity of God." *Ibid.*, 107, 24–25.

with God when he did not have writings or evidence of *all* the traditions of thought in order to verify the assumption of the universal existence of the phenomenon of union with God? Pico uses an example of his own religious tradition as a tool for identifying the same phenomenon in other non-Christian religious traditions. The example of union with God is linked to Pico's assumption of the universal occurrence of this phenomenon, as well as with other related concepts, such as the specific concept of God, man, creation and true religion, which together creates a conceptual framework characteristic of Christian thinking. When Pico applies the example of union with God to other religions and cultures, *he applies the associated assumptions and related concepts as well.*

Union with God helps Pico seek similarities in other religions and enables him identify the same or similar phenomena in Judaism (Kabbalah). There is no doubt that his intention was motivated by missionary intentions.<sup>55</sup> For Pico, the assumption of universal occurrence of the phenomenon of union with God plays a role of *pre-theoretical intuition*. In his tract, the universality of union with God is clearly present, and is undoubtedly based on the model of universality of religion, which Pico naturally assumes when identifying the phenomenon of union with God. Pico considers cultural universality of religion to be so obvious that it becomes the point of departure in his exploring of human nature, whose intrinsic part is the ability to attain what every man naturally longs for, i.e. union with God. According to Moshe Idel, the first universalization of the concept of union with God can be found in works Abraham ibn Ezra in the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>56</sup> whose concept considerably influenced ecstatic Kabbalah and Hasidism.<sup>57</sup> It was ecstatic Kabbalah, of all Kabbalistic schools, which had the greatest influence on Pico della Mirandola.<sup>58</sup>

McGinn further remarks that we first encounter such terms as "la mystique" or "mysticism" in France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Probably

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., fol. 138v–139r.

<sup>56</sup> Moshe Idel, "Univerzalization and Integration: Two Conceptions of Mystical Union in Jewish Mysticism", in: Idel–McGinn, *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith*, 28.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 27–57.

<sup>58</sup> Moshe Idel, "The Ecstatic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia in Sicily and Its Transmission", *Italia Judaica* 5 (1995), 330–340.

sometime in this period, also the term "unio mystica" started being used for different types of union with God.<sup>59</sup> Even though all the key terms undoubtedly circulated as early as in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, British Orientalists still referred to union with God, as evidenced, for example, with Sir William Jones († 1784).<sup>60</sup> Jones also uses the same example as Pico for identifying union with God in the religions of Persia and India. In the case of the Greek traditions, it builds on older authors who already identified the phenomenon of union. In his description, we can further notice that alongside the concept of union with God, other related concepts appear, as they do with Pico. It can therefore be

<sup>59</sup> McGinn, "Comments", 185. Compare with Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable. The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Chicago / London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, 79–112. Also Leigh E. Schmidt, "The Making of Modern 'Mysticism'", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71/2 (2003), 273–302.

<sup>60</sup> "I will only detain you with a few remarks on the metaphysical theology, which has been professed immemorially by a numerous sect of *Persians* and *Hindus*, was carried in part into *Greece*, and prevails even now among the learned *Muselmans*, who sometimes avow it without reserve. The modern philosophers of this persuasion are called *Súfi s*, either from the *Greek* word for a *sage*, or from the *woolen* mantle, which they used to wear in some provinces of *Persia*: their fundamental tenets are, that nothing exists absolutely but *GOD*: that the human soul is an emanation from his essence, and, though divided for a time from its heavenly source, will be finally re-united with it; that the highest possible happiness will arise from its re-union, and that the chief good of mankind, in this transitory world, consists in as perfect an *union* with *Eternal Spirit* as the incumbrances of a mortal frame will allow; that, for this purpose, they should break all *connection* (or *taaluk*, as they call it), with extrinsic objects, and pass through life without *attachments*, as a swimmer in the ocean strikes freely without the impediment of clothes; that they should be straight and free as the cypress, whose fruit is hardly perceptible, and not sink under a load, like fruit-trees *attached* to a trellis; that, if mere earthly charms have power to influence the soul, the *idea* of celestial beauty must overwhelm it in extatik delight; that, for want of apt words to express the divine perfections and the ardour of devotion, we must borrow such expressions as approach the nearest to our ideas, and speak of *Beauty* and *Love* in a transcendent and mystical sense; that, like a *reed* torn from its native bank, like a *wax* separated from its delicious honey, the soul of man bewails its disunion with *melancholy music*, and sheds burning tears, like the lighted taper, waiting passionately for the moment of its extinction, as a disengagement from earthly trammels, and the means of returning to its Only Beloved. Such in part (for I omit the minuter and more subtil metaphysiks of the *Súfi's*, which are mentioned in the *Dabistàn*) is the wild and enthusiastick religion of the modern Persian poets, especially of the sweet *HÁFIZ* and the great *Maulavi*: such is the system of the *Védánti* philosophers and best lyrick poets of *India*; and as it was a system of the highest antiquity in both nations, it may be added to the many other proofs of an immemorial affinity between them." William Jones, "The Sixth Anniversary Discourse, on the Persians, delivered 19th February 1789", in: *The Works of Sir William Jones*, vol. 3, London, 1807, 130–132.

assumed that these concepts, together with an example of union, were identified in these religions, at the latest, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century on the basis of the same assumption. Carl W. Ernst observes that for Jones all mystical doctrines were the same although expressed in different words,<sup>61</sup> demonstrating that this assumption comes from earlier scholars. Thus, for Jones, the example of union with God is associated with the same theological position as that of Pico. Ernst adds two more findings. First, it is a hypothesis about the Indian origin of mysticism, and secondly, Ernst identified the overall conceptual framework, encompassing the cultural universality of religion (mysticism) in which Jones' hypothesis was formulated. This conceptual framework enabled both Pico and Jones to predict the existence of the same or similar phenomenon in different religions without having to travel to all cultures or study literary sources of all the schools of thought to verify the assumption of the universal existence of the phenomenon of mysticism. While Pico's common denominator was the ancient theology (*prisca theologia*), Jones talks of metaphysical theology (*metaphysical theology*). The religious tradition that scholars considered to be the oldest at the time being, was a good opportunity to seek the origin of the surveyed phenomenon.

Minimally until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Christian scholars used the example of union with God in order to identify the same or similar phenomenon in non-Christian religious traditions. The number of identifications of this phenomenon increased gradually with the discovery of religion in new cultures by Christian missionaries.<sup>62</sup> The identification of the phenomenon of mysticisms was based solely on the *intuition* derived from the Christian theology, which was a common background of the contemporary scholars. We therefore talk about the Christian theological conceptual framework, which enables us to assume that any observed phenomenon is universal. In other words,

<sup>61</sup> "For him [i.e. Jones], all profoundly mystically doctrines were ultimately the same; they are expressed in 'a thousand metaphors and poetical figures, which abound in the sacred poems of the Persians and Hindus, who seem to mean the same thing in substance, and differ only in expression as their languages differ in idiom!' The Indian origin of all mysticism became a widely accepted hypothesis in Romantic circles. The universalizing impulse in Jones's interpretation of Sufism made Islamic connections interesting but incidental." (Ernst, *Sufism*, 10–11).

<sup>62</sup> Compare Balagandhara, "The Heathen in His Blindness...", 141ff.

we can find it in every religion and culture. Subsequently, this assumption is extended to every historical period of every religion and culture, as we will see later. This example served Christian scholars as a tool without which they would not be able to identify the same or similar phenomenon. The style of work of both scholars can be described as very primitive or even mechanical. In the following part, we will look at how modern scientists identify the phenomenon of mysticism, and then we will compare these two approaches.

### Identification of Unio Mystica by Moshe Idel

Philip Almond states that the dominant epistemological approach to mysticism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was essentialism.<sup>63</sup> This researcher believes that all mystical traditions share a common universal mystical "core".<sup>64</sup> When Moshe Idel speaks of mysticism, he refers to mystic contact with God achieved by a certain mystical technique,<sup>65</sup> resulting from its definition:

Let me dwell briefly upon the manner in which I understand the term *mysticism* and its derivatives in the context of the following discussions. I consider a phenomenon to be of a mystical nature when there is achieved a contact with Divine, differing from the common religious experiences cultivated in a certain religion both in its intensity and its spiritual impact. Accordingly, the interest in ecstatic and unitive experiences as they occur in Kabbalistic literature are conspicuously mystical. I also, however, consider certain types of experiences as mystical even when they differ substantially from the previous type of mysticism: I refer to the theurgical performance of the commandments as this appears in certain texts. As I

<sup>63</sup> Philip C. Almond, "Mysticism and Its Contexts", in: Robert K. C. Forman (ed.), *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, 211–219.

<sup>64</sup> Garb, "Review Article: Path of Power", 595

<sup>65</sup> "[...] what impress me more when reading the Upanishads or the Yogi treatises, the exercises of St. Ignacius, or the Sufi mystical treatises, is only the existence of fascinating theologies that allow deep mystical transformations, but primarily the existence of detailed and sophisticated treatments of mystical techniques that are supposed to induce these mystical changes." Moshe Idel, "'Unio Mystica' as a Criterion: Some Observations on 'Hegelian' Phenomenologies of Mysticism", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 1/1 (2002), 34.

shall argue below, Kabbalistic intention or *kavvanah* implied a cleaving to the Divine that preceded the theurgical operation. According to other texts – and these are the great majority – the theurgical action involved a specific contact with Divine in order to influence it [...] or even sustain it or to “make” it, in still other texts.<sup>66</sup>

Before we proceed to interpretation, let us compare the identification of mystical union (*unio mystica*) by Moshe Idel with the identification of union with God with by Pico della Mirandola, which was discussed above:

At this stage in our analysis of *devekut*, it would be worthwhile to survey the recurrence of another classical metaphor of *unio mystica* in Kabbalistic texts – namely, the dissolution of the drop of water within the sea. This metaphor is an ancient one that already appeared in the *Katha Upanishad* IV:15; in Zaehner’s rendering, it reads: “As pure water poured into pure becomes like unto it – so does the soul of the discerning sage become [like unto Brahman].” Both Muslim and Christian mysticism have employed this image as well. In Kabbalistic sources, it apparently appears for the first time in R. Isaac of Acre: “She [the soul] will cleave to the divine intellect, and it will cleave to her... and she and the intellect become one entity, as if somebody pours out a jug of water into running well, that all becomes one [...].”<sup>67</sup>

Likewise, we can ask how Idel concluded that the example of union with God (*unio mystica*) can be applied to other religions or cultures when there is no available research regarding the existence of the studied phenomenon. In this respect, Idel follows scholars and researchers in his research tradition, who naturally assumed, since the time of Pico della Mirandola, that union with God is usually cultivated by belief and religious practice,<sup>68</sup> i.e. by a particular religion, and becomes a uni-

<sup>66</sup> Idel, *Kabbalah*, xviii.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 67, n. 65.

<sup>68</sup> “The focus of the Kabbalistic theurgy is God; not man; [...] the theurgical Kabbalist does not need external help or grace; his way of operating – namely, the Torah – enables him to be independent; he looks not so much for salvation by the intervention of God as for God’s redemption by human intervention. *The theurgical Kabbalah articulates a basic feature of Jewish religion in general*: because he concentrates more upon action than upon thought, the Jew is responsible for everything, including

versal model for understanding or study of mysticism. Idel uses Pico’s example, originally designed to identify the phenomenon of union with God in non-Christian religious traditions, to identify the *unio mystica* phenomenon in non-Jewish religious traditions, namely it is *the dissolution of the drop of water within the sea*. The example of *unio mystica* serves Idel as a tool to inform him of similarities to seek in selected religious traditions. When Idel applies the example of *unio mystica* on other religions, *he also applies the associated assumptions and related concepts such as the concept of God*.

Contrary to Idel, Robert C. Zaehner does not consider the same example in *the Katha Upanishad* as a union with God because he finds that the concept of God in Indian traditions is different.<sup>69</sup> However, both agree that it is an example of *mysticism* and that the phenomenon of mysticism is usually cultivated by a particular religion. How can this discrepancy be explained in a satisfactory manner? Both researchers consistently assume that the phenomenon of mysticism is common to people of all religions and cultures, but they differ only in the choice of the example to identify the phenomenon of mysticism. If Idel in his research assumes that the universal model is *unio mystica*, he has no choice but to adapt the interpretation of collected facts to the chosen assumption. Similarly, Zaehner assumes that the phenomenon of mysticism differs not only in individual religious traditions, but even within a particular religion.<sup>70</sup> When he states the definition of mysticism, he is convinced that it is broad enough to include three types

God, since his activity is crucial for the welfare of the cosmos in general.” *Ibid.*, 179. Emphasis mine.

<sup>69</sup> “Thus there is a loss of what is normally described as personality in an eternal mode of existence. This is certainly not the *kaivalyam* of the *Yogasūtras*, nor is it union with God who stands outside the eternal mode of existence though pervading it.” Robert C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*, London: University of London, the Athlone Press, 1960, 46.

<sup>70</sup> “I chose the subject of *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* because it seemed to me that, voluminous as the literature on mysticism is, much of it starts from the quite unproven premiss that mysticism is a more or less uniform phenomenon appearing in all the great religious traditions. So far from this being the case, certain varieties of mystical experience are attested not only in different mystical traditions but also in the same religion.” *Ibid.*, v.

of mysticism, one of which corresponds to the above example.<sup>71</sup> This definition apparently does not contain the word God. The reason is simple, a definition containing the word God would exclude Buddhism,<sup>72</sup> while in this form it includes all kinds of mysticism, i.e. not only Buddhism, but also the idea of the transcendent God in the role of the creator of cosmos, which is an integral part of the model of union, as well as belief, with which religious practice in Judaism, Christianity and Islam is inherently linked to. In Judaism it concerns the performance of *mitzvot* (commandments). The reason for dividing mysticism into three types is therefore a different concept of God (or even absence of God) in different religions. Thereby Zaehner also confirms that the example of union is associated with the doctrine of the true nature of God, which he does not find with Indian mystics, which testifies to their religious tolerance.<sup>73</sup> He believes that tolerance in Indian mystics is related to the absence of a doctrine, since "Hinduism is bound by no dogmas, as Islam is, and the mystic is thus quite uninhibited in expressing any view he pleases"<sup>74</sup>. Unlike Idel, Zaehner does not consider union with God as a universal model for the study of mysticism since in Buddhism, for instance, there is no God with which the mystic might seek a union with. The application of this model is feasible in Christianity, as it states the doctrine of the incarnation of God spanning the gap between man and the transcendent God, which is, according to Zaehner, an entirely foreign idea for Judaism and Islam.<sup>75</sup> Zaehner finds support for his claim with Scholem who does not find union with God in Judaism.<sup>76</sup> In his research, Idel corrects Scholem and also researchers who built on Scholem's research.

<sup>71</sup> "[...] what we mean by mysticism. Elsewhere I have described it as 'the realization of a union or a unity with or in [or of] something that is enormously, if not infinitely, greater than the empirical self.'" Ibid., 5.

<sup>72</sup> "Indian mysticism than Śūfism, does not necessarily bring the mystic nearer to God, for neither in Buddhism nor in the Sāṃkhya system is there any God whom one may approach." Ibid., 6.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 2–3.

The submitted analysis shows that there are significant scholars in the study of Jewish mysticism who consider the theological position in mysticism still valid without actually checking its validity. In Moshe Idel, we saw that he builds on efforts and observation of Pico della Mirandola and his followers. Additionally, it appears from Idel's description that the metaphor of *unio mystica* could be of Indian origin. At this stage of our analysis we can state that Pico and Idel share identical conceptual framework for research of Jewish mysticism. If Philip S. Alexander claims that Idel's research has shaken Scholem's paradigm, it should also apply that Pico's observation has shaken it as well. So how does the approach of modern scholars differ from "primitive" efforts of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola or Sir William Jones? When we compare these two groups, we find only one difference, and it is the range of interpreted facts. Modern researchers draw their interpretations from a much larger data stock accumulated with time, unlike their predecessors. However, the assumption of universal union with God (*unio mystica*) associated with other related concepts that can be applied to all religious traditions is still dominating the contemporary research. This theological position has been uniting the scholarly and scientific community at least since the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It helps researchers find facts and also plays an important role in interpreting them.

As has been pointed out above, according to Boaz Huss, the problem lies above all in the use of the category of *mysticism*, including the theological position that everyone believes to be true without supporting this argument by solid empirical research. As a solution, Huss proposes to completely abandon this category and interpret "Kabbalah" and "Hasidism" as part of a historical, social and political structure. The question remains what we gain by abandoning the category of "Jewish mysticism" and using other term instead. A new term or introducing a new category for phenomena that are currently considered mystical does not solve the problem; as it is neither in the category nor in its name, but in the *assumption* that is associated with the category of "mysticism". Also, there are other more or less related phenomena (categories) such as religion, magic, meditation, contemplation, prayer, spirituality, or fundamentalism, which are associated with the same

assumption.<sup>77</sup> This is not a categorical or linguistic problem, but a conceptual one. In the following part I will attempt to demonstrate how the theological position determines the collection and interpretation of facts in the study of Jewish mysticism.

### Theological Assumption as a Dominant Viewpoint in the Discipline

Researchers studying mysticism start their research with the same assumption as Pico and Jones, and together they agree that the phenomenon of mysticism is universal and can be found in both Christian and non-Christian texts. Idel only says that the phenomenon of union with God can be found in Jewish and non-Jewish texts, which is essentially an identical statement. Scholem used the same intuition, even though contemporary researchers agree that each of them used different *method*. In contrast to Idel, Scholem claimed that what is common to all Jewish and non-Jewish mystics is not the expression of union with God, but the essence of ecstatic experience found both in the various stages of the development of Jewish mysticism<sup>78</sup> and in other religious traditions. The description of the union with God in Jewish mystics was considered by Scholem to be an extreme and unique case.<sup>79</sup> In other words, the example of union with God cannot, according to Scholem, be applied to the Jewish religious tradition, because there is no such phenomenon. It is far more beneficial to address the ecstatic experience we can identify with each mystic acting in a particular religious tradition, including Judaism. Since Scholem replaced the category *unio mystica* by a new category of ecstatic (mystical) experience and Idel

<sup>77</sup> See Steven T. Katz, "General Editor's Introduction", in: Steven T. Katz (ed.), *Comparative Mysticism. An Anthology of Original Sources*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 4.

<sup>78</sup> "A great distance separates these old Jewish Gnostics from the Hasidic mystics [...]. And yet it is the same experience which both are trying to express in different ways." Scholem, *Major Trends*, 5.

<sup>79</sup> "[...] it is only in extremely rare cases that ecstasy signifies actual union with God, in which the human individuality abandons itself to the rapture of complete submersion in the divine stream. Even in this ecstatic frame of mind, the Jewish mystic almost invariably retains a sense of the distance between the Creator and His creature." *Ibid.*, 122–123.

later returned to the original category, they both consistently base their research on the assumption of the universal occurrence of the phenomenon of mysticism. This assumption assists them in selecting and interpreting facts, as well as in predicting the phenomenon of mysticism in new areas of research. The change in the category that Huss considers to be the only solution, has not satisfactorily addressed the problem in the history of the study of Jewish mysticism, since both categories were associated with an identical theological position.

Schäfer's work is similar to Scholem. He also questions the claim that the example of union with God can be applied to all religious traditions. He explicitly mentions the Indian and Buddhist religious tradition, where union with God cannot be applied due to the different concepts of God and human being.<sup>80</sup> Different concepts associated with the example of union do not enable us to identify the same or similar phenomenon, thus, according to Schäfer, there are different types of mysticism. Simply put, mysticism, according to Schäfer, encompasses all the cases of union with God, as well as those cases where union with God is not present. This approach allows researchers to include almost any phenomenon in the same class of facts, although it may seem to be too distant from Jewish mysticism. This process is obvious with Jonathan Garb, under the influence of Hollenback's approach, identified, for instance, shamanism and telepathy as mystical phenomena in the Jewish religious tradition.<sup>81</sup>

In his research, Schäfer proceeds from the same theological assumption as his predecessors and criticizes Idel's essentialist thesis, the assertion that all the mystical phenomena studied are in essence the

<sup>80</sup> "Some scholars even go so far as to boldly proclaim, 'That we bear the image of God is the starting-point, one might almost say the postulate, of all Mysticism. The complete union with God is the goal of all Mysticism.' There is, however, one problem with this definition. Whether or not it fits a religion such as Judaism we will see, but what about religions that do not presuppose the existence of a transcendent God and the human soul, that is, religions that are not based on Hebrew Bible with its notion of human beings 'in the image and likeness of God'? Hindu and Buddhist mysticism, for example, suggest that the world and nature are illusions and that the deepest and truest 'unity' is achieved when awareness of the self and its connection with the world is annihilated, thus interrupting the fatal cycle of reincarnation. This kind of mysticism is called 'acosmic' or 'world-negating.'" Schäfer, *The Origins*, 3–4.

<sup>81</sup> Jonathan Garb, *Shamanic Trance in Modern Kabbalah*, Chicago / London: University of Chicago Press, 2011, 4, 108–115.

same or similar.<sup>82</sup> The subject of Schäfer's research was whether an example of union with God can also be applied to Judaism. Schäfer concludes that all the mystical phenomena supported by texts from the Hebrew Bible to the Hechalot literature that he gathered and analysed in detail in his study are very different, and therefore cannot be subsumed under a single all-embracing category, i.e. *unio mystica*.<sup>83</sup> According to Schäfer, the tested example can be used only with Philo of Alexandria.<sup>84</sup> But how could Schäfer identify the mystical phenomena of texts from different historical periods of Judaism, from different cultures and religious traditions without an assumption they have something in common? The contextual approach enables every scholar, even Schäfer, to explain all the facts available, which was already known to Katz.<sup>85</sup> This approach helps to explain also new facts, namely those that will be available from new areas of research, without the need to change the overall conceptual framework. Schäfer does not use one example as Idel, but several examples at once.<sup>86</sup> To put it simply, Schäfer uses already existing class of facts collected by former scholars based on the application of various examples enabling to see different phenomena as the same or similar.<sup>87</sup> Out of many, let us mention the *notion of heavenly ascent* of Elliot R. Wolfson. This example replaced the original model of *unio mystica* at some point and enabled the identification of the mystical phenomenon in new areas of research.<sup>88</sup> In this case, it means that the new model helped him to see

<sup>82</sup> Schäfer, *The Origins*, 17, 26.

<sup>83</sup> "As to be expected, it turns out that the phenomena collected and described under the headings 'Ezekiel,' 'Ascent Apokalyses,' 'Qumran,' 'Philo,' 'The Rabbis,' and 'Merkavah Mystics,' are greatly diverse and resist the modern scholar's desire to subsume them under a single all-embracing category." *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 352–353.

<sup>85</sup> "[...] our position is able to accommodate all the evidence which is accounted for by non-pluralistic accounts [...]." Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism", 66.

<sup>86</sup> "[...] we finally rid ourselves of the model of *unio mystica* as the ultimate litmus test for the quality of a mystical experience. Instead, now is introduced the notion of heavenly ascent as leading to an ontic transformation of the adept and resulting in his angelification or deification." Schäfer, *The Origins*, 19.

<sup>87</sup> "I [...] rely entirely on the corpus of texts that has emerged in a long tradition of previous scholarship." *Ibid.*, 24. See Jonathan M. Elukin, "A New Essenism: Heinrich Graetz and Mysticism", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59/1 (1998), 145.

<sup>88</sup> "Elliot Wolfson has made the most progress regarding a typology of the mystical experience that does not just include (alleged) ancient manifestations of Jewish mys-

the phenomenon of mysticism even where other researchers, using the original example, did not find, for instance, in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>89</sup> In other words, by applying a new example, Wolfson managed to achieve greater accuracy, i.e. a *better* match of theological position with reality.

A similar development can be observed in Schäfer, who is convinced that the prophet Ezekiel was a mystic,<sup>90</sup> which is exactly the opposite of what Scholem claimed: "It would be absurd to call Moses, the man of God, a mystic, or to apply this term to the Prophets [...]." <sup>91</sup> How is it possible that Schäfer, contrary to Scholem, considers Ezekiel's experience to be mystical? Although neither Scholem nor Schäfer have available research on the existence of the phenomenon of mysticism, they do not doubt it is usually cultivated by religion and is common to all people of all religions or cultures. Scholem only excludes the occurrence of mysticism in the "classical period" of religion, that is, in the period in which the common way of life and belief is still being established, which is, for Scholem, a prerequisite for the emergence of the phenomenon of mysticism.<sup>92</sup> Schäfer and Scholem concur in the essen-

ticism but instead takes these ancient manifestations (apocalypses, Qumran sources, Hekhalot literature) as starting point of the inquiry. [...] Wolfson finally gets to the root of the problem by stating that the modern scholarly tendency to focus on mystical union as the very essence of mysticism is informed by Neoplatonic ontology [...]. This Neoplatonic model, he posits, is alien to the Jewish sources. [...] Here we finally rid ourselves of the model of *unio mystica* as the ultimate litmus test for the quality of a mystical experience. Instead, now is introduced the notion of heavenly ascent as leading to an ontic transformation of the adept and resulting in his angelification or deification. According to this definition, Wolfson finds 'mysticism' in the ascent apocalypses [...], the so-called Self Glorification Hymn from Qumran [...], and, most prominently, in the Hekhalot literature. The advantage of this definition consists in the fact that it does not impose a terminology on the ancient texts that is alien to them (such as 'mystical union') but takes the experience described in these texts as its starting point [...]." Schäfer, *The Origins*, 17–20.

<sup>89</sup> "The use of word 'mystic' in relation to biblical texts represents a major departure from the general view taken by scholars who follow the lead of Gershom Scholem." Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 4, n. 5.

<sup>90</sup> Schäfer, *The Origins*, 34–52.

<sup>91</sup> "The fact is that nobody seriously thinks of applying the term *mysticism* to the classic manifestations of the great religions. It would be absurd to call Moses, the man of God, a mystic, or to apply this term to the Prophets [...]." Scholem, *Major Trends*, 6. See *Ibid.*, 7–9.

<sup>92</sup> "And only now that religion has received, in history, its classical expression in a *certain communal way of living and believing*, only now do we witness the phenomenon called mysticism [...]." *Ibid.*, 8. Emphasis mine.

tial condition of the existence of a link between belief and religious practice for the emergence of the phenomenon of mysticism, but they differ in their views from when we can identify this link in Judaism. Schäfer refers to this link as a combination of ideas and practices in a particular community of people,<sup>93</sup> and assumes that this link is not only universal (this is where both Scholem and Schäfer agree) but exists in all the studied periods of Judaism (which is where they differ). For Schäfer, the occurrence of the link between ideas and practices corresponds to the occurrence of the phenomenon of mysticism, which he identifies not only in different religions but primarily within Judaism from the Hebrew Bible to the Hechalot literature. Not only Scholem and Schäfer, but also other scholars of mysticism, are convinced that the link between belief and religious practice is common to all people of all religions and cultures and is indispensable for identifying the phenomenon of mysticism.<sup>94</sup> However, there are also researchers studying mysticism in Asian traditions, who claim that mystical experience is *independent* from doctrines and rituals.<sup>95</sup> In both approaches,

<sup>93</sup> "So I will use the term 'origins' in a much more modest sense, namely, as the beginnings of something that has subsequently been labeled 'Jewish mysticism'. And with 'beginnings' [...] I mean [...] a process that extended over a protracted period and was not bound to one particular place. [...] I do not envision this process to be linear and progressive; on the contrary, I expect it to materialize differently at different times and places, not in a linear development from A to B to C but as a *polymorphic web or network of ideas* that are not free-floating but *manifest themselves in certain practices of individuals* as members of certain communities. Whether these ideas can be tied together under a common denominator – for example, 'mysticism' [...], remains to be seen." Schäfer, *The Origins*, 23. Emphasis mine.

<sup>94</sup> Jacob Neusner refers to the faith of the Jewish ancestors by the word "myth". Comp. Jacob Neusner, "Judaic Myth in Liturgy and Life", *The Journal of Religion* 50/1 (1970), 58–68. Also Yehuda Liebes: "[...] the mythical status of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is even higher than that of the Greek myth, which gave birth to the term. Undoubtedly, in Greece as well, *myth was foundation of ritual* [...]." Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*, New York: SUNY Press, 1993, 5. The existence of different terms for "belief" in research is related to the opinion of scientists that in some religions or cultures the existence of belief is controversial. However, this does not prevent them from adapting the union of faith and practice to theological position.

<sup>95</sup> "The fact that Yoga, Taoism, and many schools of Buddhism regard mystical experience as dependent on human effort is related to their anthropocentrism, rationalism, and relative independence of philosophical evaluation and religious context – for example, of particular doctrines and rituals." Frits Staal, *Exploring Mysticism: A Methodological Essay*, Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of Carolina

however, the scholars agree that the idea of cultural universality of mysticism is still valid. A researcher who is convinced of the validity of his or her assumption will sooner or later come to the conclusion that it is suitable for explaining the studied phenomenon.<sup>96</sup>

In this respect, Schäfer builds on the research tradition of his discipline. Each example helps Schäfer identify a certain part of the studied phenomenon of mysticism presented both in Jewish and other religious traditions and in this way he attempts to achieve greater accuracy, a *better* match of theological position with reality. He seems to be trying to complete the overall picture of the phenomenon as a mosaic of different historical periods,<sup>97</sup> which is confirmed by the fact that he tries to identify with every text how it could contribute to the *question of mysticism*,<sup>98</sup> i.e. to explain the phenomenon of mysticism. At the same time, he thus admits that the various phenomena analysed *have* actually something in common. Schäfer calls a phenomenon *mystical* only if it was in agreement with his intuitive idea of what mystical is. This intuition comes from the Christian theological conceptual framework and allows us to see the phenomenon of mysticism as a universal phenomenon. The use of the category of mysticism is certainly not a question of taste,<sup>99</sup> as Schäfer thinks, but it is associated with a theological position as with other scholars and significantly determines the

Press, 1975, 127. This statement coincides with the assumption chosen in his research: "[...] I hope to show that mysticism need not necessarily be regarded as a part of religion." (Ibid., 4, 190ff). According to Staal, the phenomenon of mysticism can not be studied and understood from a theological point of view (*irrational approach*), i.e. it is a result of the action of God (Ibid., 125), but from a biological point of view (*rational*): "Mysticism and mystical experience cannot be understood in isolation from the more general problem of the nature of mind. Conversely no theory of mind which cannot account for mystical experience can be adequate." Ibid., 198. In this way, Staal succeeds in preserving the validity of the cultural universality of mysticism.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. "[...] the two-sphere universe provides no explanation unless it is believed to be true." Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution. Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, 39.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. the context in which Elior uses the term "mosaic". Elior, *Jewish Mysticism*, 14–15.

<sup>98</sup> "In analyzing certain core texts I attempt to capture and describe the 'toponymy' and nomenclature of these texts on their own terms, but of course always with an eye to what they may or may not contribute to the question of 'mysticism'." Schäfer, *The Origins*, 24.

<sup>99</sup> "[...] the answer to the question of whether or not mysticism remains a meaningful category for the period under consideration – that is, before the rise of Kabbalah in Western Europe – becomes largely a matter of taste." Ibid., 354–355.



nature of his research. It is clear from Schäfer's approach that he uses the category of *mysticism* as a common category for all the different phenomena described in the individual chapters of his research. It is an analysis of source texts depicting Jewish experience in various historical stages, with which he naturally assumes to be mystical, without realizing that the selection of facts and their interpretation is determined by theological position. For this reason, his approach is in fact *essentialist*. In the past, it often seemed very difficult to apply the "universal" model of union with God to the Hebrew Bible, the Qumran texts, Indian tradition, and Buddhism. One possible conclusion could be that the phenomenon of mysticism in a particular religion, culture, or period of Jewish development is simply not present. Nevertheless, in such cases, the scholars began to argue that the phenomenon of mysticism is actually present, but not as *unio mystica*, but as an "ecstatic experience" with the prophet Ezekiel,<sup>100</sup> as "unio angelica" or "unio liturgica" in the Qumran texts,<sup>101</sup> or as "acosmic mysticism" in Buddhism.<sup>102</sup> Most scholars were unable to imagine the possibility of absence of the phenomenon of mysticism; therefore these partial disagreements with the paradigm (anomalies), or, in our case, discrepancy with theological position, were either dismissed or were interpreted in accordance with it.<sup>103</sup>

The idea of universal mysticism is undoubtedly analogous to the idea of the cultural universality of religion which dominates and determines research in the study of religion.<sup>104</sup> Even before the discipline was established, many scholars considered the phenomenon of mysticism to be a foreign element in the Jewish religion,<sup>105</sup> while contemporary scholars do not hesitate to place the origins of Jewish mysticism with

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 4. See Merkur, *Mystical Moments*, 22.

<sup>103</sup> See Schäfer, *The Origins*, 17–18.

<sup>104</sup> Balagangadhara, "The Heathen in His Blindness...", 241–288.

<sup>105</sup> E.g. Baruch Spinoza, David Friedlander or Heinrich Graetz. See Byron L. Sherwin, *Kabbalah: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006, 3–5. We encounter similar views even today: "Kabbalah is sometimes referred to as 'Jewish mysticism', but to call Kabbalah 'mysticism' is misleading, at best." *The Tree of Life – Chayyim Vital's Introduction to the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria – The Palace of Adam Kadmon*, ed. by W. Donald Menzi and Zve Padeh, New York: Arizal, 2008, xlviii.

the prophet Ezekiel. From such a simple outline of the development of the discipline, it can be concluded that researchers first dealt with identifying the phenomenon of mysticism in individual religions<sup>106</sup> and subsequently in different historical stages of specific religious traditions.<sup>107</sup> In particular, the second part of the outlined process in the study of Jewish mysticism is still ongoing. It is manifested by the cumulative collection of data and their subsequent interpretation, based in most cases on the assumption of universal occurrence of the phenomenon of mysticism. In this way, the scientific community seeks to achieve greater precision and extends the field of scientific knowledge. In Judaism, the phenomenon of mysticism has been identified in almost all periods.<sup>108</sup> Starting with the ecstatic experience of the prophet Ezekiel, through *devekut* by R. Isaac of Acre, to shamanic trance in modern Kabbalah.<sup>109</sup> All mystical phenomena have been identified in accordance with the assumption that tells us that the studied phenomenon is common to all people of all religions and cultures. Although it is not possible to speak of the paradigm here in the same way as with advanced sciences as Astronomy, Physics, or Chemistry (it is a "mere" theological position which fulfils the role of pre-theoretical intuition), Kuhn recognizes the different *nature* of the paradigm in a discipline in the pre-paradigmatic period. In the study of mysticism, this assumption (paradigm) has several interrelated tasks. It helps to unify the scientific community, to collect and interpret facts, as well as to anticipate the phenomenon of mysticism in new areas of research.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. debate on Sufism: "Thus the term *Sufi-ism* was invented at the end of the eighteenth century, as an appropriation of those portions of 'Oriental' culture that Europeans found attractive. The essential feature of the definitions of Sufism that appeared at this time was the insistence that Sufism had no intrinsic relation with the faith of Islam." Ernst, *Sufism*, 9.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. debate on mysticism in Protestantism: "German Protestant theology has been on the whole more negative than positive in its evaluation of the place of mysticism. [...] [Albert] Ritschl's brief essay *Theologie und Metaphysik*, published in 1881, is the classic expression of the deep division he found between Christian faith and mysticism." Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, New York: Crossroad, 1991, 267.

<sup>108</sup> Dan, *History of Jewish Mysticism*, 15; Elior, *Jewish mysticism*, 14; Hallamish, *Kabbalah*, 9–17.

<sup>109</sup> Garb, *Shamanic Trance*, 33.

The aim of the majority of scholars is to achieve a *better* match of the theological position with reality when finding new facts.

Since researchers in the study of Jewish mysticism do not use a previously established theory explaining the phenomenon of mysticism, there is nothing left for the scientific community than to build on the observation of Jewish and Christian scholars. The discussion of Jewish mysticism clearly shows a high degree of mutual disagreement among scholars as to the legitimacy of scientific problems and methods used. Scientists, for example, differ in answers to the basic question: What makes a phenomenon a mystical phenomenon? The research shows that what makes the phenomenon a mystical phenomenon in Judaism does not make the phenomenon mystical phenomenon in Indian traditions or Buddhism.<sup>110</sup> And, furthermore, what makes the experience mystical in the prophet Ezekiel does not make the experience mystical in R. Isaac of Acre. Almost the entire scientific community is convinced that in all these cases it is phenomenon of *mysticism*. In another paradigm, say non-theological, we would first have to clarify what makes union with God, experience, techniques, etc., *mystical* union, *mystical* experience and *mystical* techniques. And then, we would also have to clarify whether the same thing that makes, for example, the experience of Augustine mystical, makes it mystical in Avraham Abulafia and in other authors. Only at this stage of research would we be able to conduct research into the existence of the phenomenon of mysticism, which would in fact mean testing the theological position and answering the question of whether the phenomenon of mysticism is common to all people of all religions and cultures. In a similar way, Academician Kotta went on to discuss Senator Gaia Velleio's assumptions about exploring the nature of the Gods in Cicero's tract *De natura deorum*:

In this investigation of the nature of the gods, the primary issue is whether they exist or not? You say that it is difficult to deny it. I agree, if the question is posed in public, but it is quite easy in this type of conversation conducted between friends. So though I am a pontifex myself and though I believe that our ritual and our state-observances should be most

<sup>110</sup> Stepan Lisý, "Preliminary Remarks for the Comparative Study of Mysticism: Mysticism is, what unio mystica is", *Communio Viatorum* 54/1 (2012), 88–107.

religiously maintained, I should certainly like to be persuaded of the fundamental issue that god exist, not merely as an expression of opinion but as a statement of truth; [...] virtually all philosophers – I include myself particularly – like the idea that god exists. So I do not dispute the fact, but the argument you adduce I do not consider to be sufficiently strong. You advanced, as a sufficiently compelling proof for us to acknowledge the existence of gods, that persons of all communities and nations believe it to be so. But this argument is not merely unsubstantial in itself, but also untrue. To begin with, what is the source of your knowledge of the beliefs of nations? My own opinion is that many races are so monstrously barbarous that they entertain no suspicion that gods exist. A second argument. Did not Diagoras, the man they called the Atheist, and after him Theodorus openly dispense with gods and their nature? (*De natura deorum* I, 62–63)<sup>111</sup>

Kotta considers the opinion of the nations (*consensus gentium*) to be a completely wrong argument in the academic debate. The claim that a phenomenon exists or does not exist on the basis of a consensus does not yet prove that it really is. The same stance is held by Popper: "No statement is true, and no inference is valid, just because we feel (however strongly) that it is. [...] However, optical illusions, to take a comparatively simple example, show that we cannot rely too much on our intuition, even if it takes a form somewhat akin to compulsion."<sup>112</sup> For the same reason, the statement that the phenomenon of mysticism is common to the people of all religions and cultures cannot be valid only because the majority of scholars in this or that discipline are convinced of this assumption.<sup>113</sup> Because such a statement does not yet prove that

<sup>111</sup> Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 24.

<sup>112</sup> Karl R. Popper, *Unended Quest. Intellectual Autobiography*, London / New York: Routledge, 1992, 167.

<sup>113</sup> "The present *consensus* regarding the diversity of mystical experiences has been phrased in a manner that is one sided and categorical. The recognition that religious doctrines contribute content to mystical experience (James, 1902; Owen, 1971) was developed by Steven Katz (1978) into the general claim that there are no unmediated experiences. No differently than all other experiences, mystical experiences are partly or wholly shaped by the individuals who have them. A *consensus* has since developed that personal, cultural, and universal factors are interwoven in mystical experiences [...]. Although two generations of historians of religion noted differences among introspective and extrovertive mysticism, personal and impersonal mysticism, experience of pure affect and experience of nothing, these phenomenological obser-

it really is. While we cannot criticize Christian scholars, such as Pico, for this statement, scientists such as Moshe Idel need to validate the assertion. Given that we do not encounter any research running into the existence the existence of the phenomenon of mysticism, it is very likely that the concept of mysticism plays, in research, a role of *pre-theoretical intuition* as with the case of religion.<sup>114</sup>

### Conclusion

In the history of studies of mysticism we can encounter Jewish and Christian researchers, who, in the period from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, who discussed union with God exclusively within their own tradition. At least since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Christian scholars have gradually begun to identify the same or similar phenomenon in non-Christian religious traditions using the example of union with God. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this concept was further developed by modern scholars and became a model called *unio mystica*. This example enables to see originally diverse phenomena subsequently as the same or similar, which is the interpretation of the essentialists. The contextualists, by contrast, criticize the above mentioned thesis and claim that the mystical phenomena that essentialists see as the same or similar are in fact not identical and they have nothing in common. However, these researchers are firmly convinced that the phenomena they study are *mystical*. Therefore, both these approaches are essentially essentialist, and the transition from one to the other cannot be considered as a transition to advanced science or paradigm shift, using the words of Thomas S. Kuhn.

An example of union with God under the term of *unio mystica* provided a model for further tradition of research which has, in fact, persisted until today, for example, in research of Professor Moshe Idel. Other scholars, e.g. Peter Schäfer, explicitly talk about the problems

ations have been neglected by the current debate." Merkur, *Mystical Moments*, 22. Also: "Unfortunately for Idel, Scholem's verdict that 'a total union with the Divine is absent in Jewish texts' has been accepted by most modern scholars of both Jewish as well as general mysticism." Schäfer, *The Origins*, 17.

<sup>114</sup> Balagangadhara, "The Heathen in His Blindness...", 241-288.

associated with the application of this model and resort to another example or to a whole group of examples that allow the identification of the phenomenon of mysticism in more cases than was allowed by the original model. In this way, members of the scientific community achieve a *better* match of theological position with reality. If normal scientific research in the study of Jewish mysticism continued in the same way, we could expect that the match would be *even better*. For individual researchers, the concept of mysticism plays the role of pre-theoretical intuition and determines the research activities of the entire discipline. Each example in the study of mysticism helps particular researchers look at similarities in the chosen historical period of culture or religious tradition, and enables them to identify the sought phenomenon. As has been said, the chosen assumption along with the example helps individual researchers in collecting and interpreting facts, as well as anticipating the phenomenon studied in new areas of research. The collected facts in the study of Jewish mysticism are not theoretically neutral, but they are determined by theological position. This assumption is an analogy to the cultural universality of religion and is an integral part of the Christian theological frame of thought that is characteristic of our Western culture.

The study of mysticism is a highly cumulative enterprise with an ever-expanding field of scientific understanding and its precision in the same conceptual framework or, according to Kuhn's terminology, paradigm. The above mentioned paradigm determines not only the research of the surveyed discipline but also related disciplines, in which we can observe individual researchers or whole groups attempting to identify the phenomena of mysticism in various cultures and religious traditions. Since the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the history of the research of mysticism has provided many examples developing the scientific discipline before it can adopt first generally accepted paradigm. In this period, there are as many views of mysticism, as there are prominent researchers in the field, e.g. Scholem, Katz, Idel, Hollenback, Schäfer, etc. All these numerous concepts have something in common; they are based on identical theological position. This assumption is still considered valid by the scientific community, it has never undergone a critical examination in its research tradition, and, together with

methodological essentialism, significantly determines the research of mysticism.

**Summary:** According to Thomas S. Kuhn what changes with the transition to maturity of discipline is not the presence of a paradigm but rather its nature. The purpose of this study is to analyse a nature of paradigm in the study of Jewish mysticism. In the present article I attempt to show, that the discipline shares many characteristic features of the schools of pre-paradigm period caused by the absence of a pre-established theory. Despite the fact we are able to observe that the community of scientists shares the sorts of elements which we might label a paradigm. It is the cultural universality of religion as a pre-theoretical intuition that unites the whole community. This theological assumption governs not only the study of religion but the study of Jewish mysticism as well. It helps to unify the scientific community, interpret all the collected facts, and predict the same or similar phenomenon in new areas of research. For that purpose, most of members of the community use simple tools (e.g. an union with God) in order to identify a phenomenon of mysticism.

**Keywords:** Jewish Mysticism – Paradigm – Pre-paradigm period – Mystical union – Mysticism

## “I FELT IT... IT WAS PERFECT”: APOLLO, DIONYSUS, CHRIST, AND BLACK SWAN

*Pavol Bargár, Prague*

### Introduction

*Black Swan* (2010) is the fifth feature film of the American director Darren Aronofsky.<sup>1</sup> Being often described as a psychological thriller with elements of horror and melodrama, the film stars Natalie Portman as Nina, a young ballerina who is to play the double role of the White Swan and the Black Swan in a production of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* ballet by a New York City company. Therefore, Jadranka Skorin-Kapov very aptly argues that “the film can be perceived as a poetic metaphor for the birth of an artist, that is, as a visual representation of Nina's psychic odyssey toward achieving artistic perfection and of the price to be paid for it”.<sup>2</sup> Not only being a box office success, the imaginatively portrayed, disturbing story of a young dancer also won much critical acclaim.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This study is a part of the research project “Myth as a Means of Expression of Narrative Theology” (GAČR P401/14-22950P,) supported by the Czech Science Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Jadranka Skorin-Kapov, *Darren Aronofsky's Films and the Fragility of Hope*, New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, 96.

<sup>3</sup> The online film review portal Rotten Tomatoes gives *Black Swan* the total score of 86%, while the critics consensus is evaluating the film with words as “bracingly intense, passionate, and wildly melodramatic, *Black Swan* glides on Darren Aronofsky's bold direction – and a bravura performance from Natalie Portman”. Cited from [http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/black\\_swan\\_2010/](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/black_swan_2010/) (accessed December 7, 2017). Furthermore, it is no. 3 on the 2010 Film Critic Top Ten List on the Metacritic website. See <http://www.metacritic.com/feature/film-critic-top-ten-lists> (accessed December 7, 2017). Nevertheless, it needs to be mentioned that not all reviews were favorable. For example, José Teodoro deems that “for all his command of adrenalized, propulsive narrative and his dazzling technical facility, Aronofsky's study in female hysteria ultimately favors frenzy over compassion or insight – and remains strictly skin-deep” (José Teodoro, “Black Swan”, *Film Comment* 46, 6 [2010], 70).