Mystical Claims and Embodied Knowledge in a Post-Metaphysical Age

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Introduction

Those who study or use Ken Wilber's Integral Theory, Andrew Cohen's Evolutionary Enlightenment, or derivative frameworks face conundrums as they try to hold and disseminate the more mystical and metaphysical aspects of these works and explain or justify them within the culture at large (or some targeted audience), outside of the company of fellow integralists.

Consider the following quote from Wilber's Excerpt A of the in-progress Volume 2 of the Kosmos Trilogy. Wilber describes "the great morphic field of evolutionary potential…pulling all manifest holons back to their ever-present Ground as Spirit--a Kosmic field of Agape, gently pulling evolution into greater and greater consciousness, embrace, inclusion. […] The reality, suchness, or isness of every holon is actually Spirit…a drive which ultimately wants to embrace the entire Kosmos itself. […] This ultimate realization [is] of the ever-present, spaceless and therefore infinite, timeless and therefore eternal, formless and therefore omnipresent, Condition of all conditions and Nature of all natures and radically groundless Ground of all grounds."

Wilber and Cohen, and others following them, are unabashed in making claims about ultimate reality, the infinite, and the primeval or primordial. They follow the lead of spiritualists and mystics throughout history who have set a precedent for definitive-sounding metaphysical statements. In a recent audio dialogue with Alan Combs, Wilber uses such phrases as "infinite vastness," "open suchness," "infinite peace," "true self," and

1 An extended version of this paper can be found at www.perspegrity.com/papers.
"always already liberated" (one is tempted to put all of these in capitals). One of Wilber's primary students and colleagues, Clint Fuhs, says that "...perspectives are primordial, which is to say they are the most fundamental or primeval elements of reality, existing at or from the beginning of time" (2010, p. 1). Jeff Carreira, a student and colleague of Andrew Cohen's, uses phrases such as "the dimension of the profound," "mystical deeper reality," "timeless present," "eternal now," and "infinite spaciousness" in an audio dialogue with Patricia Albere.

The statements above are not poetry or metaphor, nor are they sage advice about life, morality, or spirituality—they are truth claims about reality. The have some of the flavor of esoteric mysteries offered by spiritual authorities from 19th century occultism, yet are offered in the context of sophisticated post-post-modern frameworks of reality and knowledge building. They invite forms of “magical thinking” and “misplaced concreteness,” even if those offering the claims do not succumb to them.

To be generous and respectful of mystical ideas and their originators, we can grant that mystical claims can spring from sublime and esoteric experiences, and may hold intuitions or wisdom that is difficult to put into words. One can hear such ideas, feel inspired, and resonate deeply with what they are pointing to or where they are coming from—but how does one hold what seems valuable and true about such statements, coming from admired teachers and colleagues, in a way that honors a level of reflectivity and critical thinking which is required for ideas to seem legitimate, intelligent, careful, and respectful in contemporary (post-post-modern) dialogue? How does one speak to and

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of such ideas in a way that honors their importance, usefulness, and deep meaning to oneself (and others), while yet acknowledging fallibility and remaining open to revision and critique? Wanting the perspectives offered by Wilber and Cohen to find their way into the wider culture, how can one expect those not "in the choir" to take them, and us, seriously, if mystical truth claims come wrapped in the bundle? In trying to share such ideas, how do we avoid the extremes of speaking with unjustified confidence and arrogance; or feeling tongue-tied and inarticulate regarding why we believe; or sounding like naive devotees of the One Revealed Truth? We cannot expect to be taken seriously by those we wish to collaborate with or influence if we unreflectively conflate wisdom concerning values and the human condition with universal knowledge claims about the nature of external reality.\(^4\)

My inquiry here is partly about the individual's struggle to open to mystical "truths" while keeping an appropriately critical and objective stance; and also about the collective project of knowledge building and sharing within a community that values self-reflective and complex multi-perspectival reasoning (as the integral community does). In this article I will explore the nature of metaphysical, and especially mystical, ideas; describe why they are problematic in a post-metaphysical philosophical era; and suggest some heuristics for working productively, reflectively, and ethically with such beliefs.

Why should integralists reflect on and discuss the nature and limitations of mystical beliefs? Why should the modes of certainty, explanation, and justification used with such beliefs matter to us? Integralists are called to enact their principles and values, and, in taking a philosophical approach to important life questions, to perform self-reflective and "construct-aware" modes of communication. In "Embodied Realisms and

\(^4\) Though we can and should reflect upon the nuanced interrelationship between facts and values.
Integral Ontologies: Toward Self-Critical Theories" (Murray, 2013), I offer what I call "The Idea Portability Principle:" that understanding and dealing with the indeterminacy of ideas is more important the greater the distance between the world views or beliefs of interlocutors. In that article I focused on ontological beliefs, and here I focus more on mystical beliefs. From that article:

Why is [knowledge fallibility and] concept indeterminacy important for integral theorists and practitioners to consider and understand? As long as one is developing and using integral theories and models within the community of the enculturated (preaching to the choir), these issues seem inert. But when one tries to (a) cross disciplinary boundaries to interact with other communities, (b) apply these ideas and explain one's purposes to stakeholders, or (c) have a constructive dialogue with others who don't agree with some aspect of the theory or model—that is, when the integral world view needs to reach across and communicate with other world views or conceptual frames—then the ontological issues of [knowledge fallibility and] concept indeterminacy are critically important to understand (and ameliorate or cope with).

One could say that those claiming mystical beliefs in fact have a sophisticated, nuanced, and humble understanding of them and the hermeneutic issues of communicating the ideas, and that the certainty with which they offer mystical claims is a strategic move meant to inspire, convince, and motivate. But this raises ethical concerns of how actions (speech acts) reflect one's values in terms of transparency, integrity, self-reflection, and co-evolution. The mode of one's speech (the "illocutionary force") can convey more than its content and can leave a more lasting impression. At any rate, this article is targeted not to the Wilbers and Cohens of the world, but toward the rest of us who must interpret, digest, modify, and pass on ideas from leading thinkers. For us understanding the sources of belief fallibility provides an important perspective. More generally I am interested in how the wisdom discovered in deep spiritual and

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5 This is not a simple question. Speech always has a strategic component, and one is limited in the amount of nuance or transparency that is communicable to certain audiences.
contemplative pursuits can be offered to those with strong scientific or critical bents by appropriately (or strategically) framing the more metaphysical aspects of this wisdom.

In this I will explain some sources of fallibility in mystical and metaphysical thinking. I will begin a conversation on how to honor, use, co-create, and promulgate mystical and metaphysical ideas that avoids the most serious implications of their fallibility. I will apply concepts explained in Murray (2010, 2012, 2013), including Embodied Realism, indeterminacy analysis, epistemic drives, and meaning-generative claims, specifically to the domain of mystical/metaphysical claims.

**Metaphysics and Mysticism**

The metaphysical claims we are concerned about here tend to have a mystical bent. In "Mysticism and Logic," Bertrand Russell says that metaphysical claims are based on a mixture of mystical and scientific impulses, with some philosophers leaning definitively in one direction or other, while other philosophers who use both must struggle to reconcile these very different modalities. He describes several common characteristics of mystical knowledge, which I summarize as follows:

- **Mysticism** has "a certain intensity and depth of feeling in regard to what is believed about the universe." It has a sense of "certainty and revelation." Though it sometimes uses logic to justify beliefs, the claims seem to come from "a way of wisdom, sudden, penetrating, coercive, which is contrasted with the slow and fallible [process of scientific reasoning]."
- **Mystics** are attempting "an articulation upon the inarticulate experience gained in the moment of" what is called insight or intuition.
- **There is a"sense of a mystery unveiled [and] revelation" of "a reality behind the world of appearances and utterly different from it." Truth and essence is found through profound introspective thought, not through sense experience.
- **Mysticism** can be expressed in deeply poignant, poetic, or metaphorical prose.
- **It often plays with opposites and paradox, pointing beyond them to knowledge that resolves or harmonizes them (as in Heraclitus' "Good and ill are one.").**
- **It often deals with universals, infinites, essences, or foundational truths.**
- **There is a common "belief in unity, and its refusal to admit opposition or division anywhere"—that "reality is one and indivisible."** There is also commonly a belief that
reality, or ultimate reality, is beyond time and space. This relates to the above mentioned [resolution] of opposites, as past, present, and future are one.

These qualities are quite evident in the quotes above from Wilber, Cohen, and others.

Russell, though considered one of the great Western philosophers, was writing a century ago before certain perspectives and differentiations were widely acknowledged in philosophy, including a fuller working out of the embodied nature of thought, the limitations of language described by the post-modernists, and the post-metaphysical perspective on truth developed by Habermas and others. I use Russell for his clear articulation of the elements of mystical thinking and his pointing to some of the problems of basing metaphysical truth claims on mystical thinking. Russell actually reaches a similar conclusion to mine, though I will take a more contemporary (and post-post modern) path, and will offer more specific conceptual tools to approach the issues. In "Mysticism and Logic" Russell concludes that "while fully developed mysticism seems to me [a mistaken outcome of the emotions], I yet believe that by sufficient restraint, there is an element of wisdom to be learned by the mystical way of feeling, which does not seem to be attainable in any other manner [and which is] to be commended as an attitude toward life, not as a creed about the world" (p. 12; emphasis is mine).

Preliminaries: On Experience, Concepts, Skills, etc.
At this point I will introduce some terms and distinctions that I will use throughout the article. First, drawing on the points made in "On the Development of beliefs vs. capacities: Post-metaphysical implications of second tier skillfulness" (Murray, 2010), it is useful to differentiate beliefs vs. skills/capacities. This distinction is similar to the declarative (or verbal) knowledge (know-that) vs. procedural knowledge (know-how)
distinction made in cognitive psychology. Developmental narratives within the integral community often conflate the development of *skills* (or capacities) with the development of *beliefs* (including values, knowledge, and worldviews).

Next, it will be useful to differentiate several types of belief or knowledge as in the following figure (taken from Murray, 2013):

![Figure 1: Categories of Knowledge/Belief](image)

**Non/pre-linguistic knowledge** includes experience, skills, and other unconscious or implicit phenomena. These form the basis of the linguistic/symbolic types of knowledge in the figure. Examples from this category include beliefs that "this is a tree" or "I should take this job" before attaching words to the thought. Included in this category are "intuitions" before they are conceived in words and symbolic categories. The category is a rough heuristic kitchen-skink that points to all the mental processes *not* in the symbolic/linguistic categories. It includes both ideas and phenomena that we sense consciously, and a huge set of complex un- or pre-conscious mental processes.

The lower part of Figure 1 illustrates verbal/explicit belief or knowledge. **Concepts** (constructs or categories) can be thought of as the words or terms, especially (but not only) nouns and verbs. They are the building blocks of language and verbal thought. They work to break the world into categories—conifer vs. not conifer;
democratic vs. not democratic; subjective vs. not-subjective (or objective), etc.\textsuperscript{6}

**Statements** (propositions, claims, beliefs, etc.) are built up from concepts, and give relationships among them. Examples are "conifers are..." "all liberals should..." and "the cognitive line leads other lines." **Models and theories** are systems of related statements (including beliefs). Examples of models/theories include AQAL, Spiral Dynamics, Freud's theory of the unconscious, and Einstein's Theory of Relativity. I include "World View" in the diagram to point to even larger scale belief systems, composed of many models, theories, concepts, etc.

In our discussion of the sources of fallibility of knowledge, we will see that each level has different epistemic concerns and types of fallibility, and that succeeding layers accumulate the fallibilities and indeterminacies of layers they are built upon. In a sense, statements are claims about what is *true* while concepts regulate the ontological questions about what is *real* (both what is part of reality and what can be counted as a distinct object of consideration). Metaphysical and mystical statements are often ontological in nature, concerning the fundamental nature or essence of reality.

There is another important point about Experience vs. Knowledge in light of our discussion of mystical and metaphysical thinking. Though we treat an experience such as the *taste of chocolate* as mundane, and an experience such as a meditative state of witness-consciousness or non-dual oneness as sublime, they share many properties, along with all experiences. They are essentially indescribable to any who have not experienced anything similar. Both are equally beyond words and in that sense mysterious. The main

\textsuperscript{6} Example *experiences* include the taste of chocolate; a gut certainty; a meditative state; riding a bike; and what it is like being a parent or a Hindu in Algeria.
difference is that tasting chocolate is common whereas advanced meditative states are not common and thus knowledge based on these experiences is esoteric.

The final useful distinction I will introduce is that of abstract concepts. George Lakoff's work on conceptual structures (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999) shows that the indeterminacy of concepts becomes progressively worse the more abstract they are, i.e. the further removed from concrete sensory experience and exemplars. Similarly, Chris Argyris says about the level of statements: "the likelihood of differences in the interpretations of different observers increases the higher one goes on the ladder of inference" (1995, p 58). Rungs along this "ladder" are inferential steps that can represent increases in abstraction, complexity, or contingency that lead one ever further from concrete facts. Esbjörn-Hargens (2010) uses the term "epistemological distance" (from Carolan, 2005) to describe differences along this ladder of inference or abstraction.

**Post-metaphysics and problems with metaphysical knowledge**

*Metaphysics* concerns the fundamental, ultimate, or essential nature of reality. *Ontology* is often treated as a branch of metaphysics and focuses more on the level of concepts, i.e. on what is real, as opposed to what is true (i.e. statements). Ontology can also concerns how we name and categorize aspects of reality. *Mysticism* is a type of metaphysical pursuit that draws its conclusions from (purported) communion with and direct experience with ultimate reality and draws conclusions using intuition, instinct, or insight.

Metaphysical and mystical questions call out for answers from deep within the human psyche, and metaphysical and mystical themes often involve the most generalized, foundational, or essentialist claims, infused with the deepest sense of meaning. Yet
philosophical arguments trying to establish the reality or nature of constructs such as
time, space, causality, god, soul, ego, evolution, freedom, consciousness, being, or life
have been famously thorny, convoluted, or inconclusive throughout history. I will note
three areas of concern. Below, at the level of statements, I will discuss problems in
making definitive truth claims on mystical topics, drawing on Habermas. In the next
section I will discuss problems at the level of the underlying concepts used to build up
metaphysical claims, drawing on research in cognitive psychology as argued by George
Lakoff. Third, in the penultimate section, I will approach the issue at the level of
experience and phenomenology and bring in the idea of epistemic drives. Finally, in the
conclusion I will suggest one way to redeem the value in mystical claims.

Metaphysics is often about objects or phenomena that are said to exist both
outside physical reality (the physical world of concrete objects, sensory experience, and
causal mechanism) and independently outside the subjective (or intersubjective) realm of
human thought forms (which Roy Bhaskar (1975) calls intransigent objects). Scholars
have developed methods and conventions, including the scientific paradigm, for
justifying and testing claims about physical reality. They have also developed methods
and conventions, albeit less rigorous, for justifying and testing claims about subjective
realities. But on what basis does one justify a metaphysical claim, one that points to a
reality beyond both mind and matter?

These and related problems with metaphysics lead historically to so-called post-
metaphysical approaches. In Integral Spirituality Wilber (2006) says that "[arguably,]
metaphysics…ended with Kant [who realized that] we do not perceive empirical objects
in a completely realistic, pregiven fashion; but rather, structures of the knowing subject
import various characteristics to the known object. [...] Metaphysics is then a broad name for the type of thinking that can't figure [out that] reality is not a perception, but a conception…thinking that falls prey to the myth of the given." (p. 231).

Jürgen Habermas, the acknowledged expert on the topic of post-metaphysics, says that the main task of philosophy is not in establishing infallible truths, but in "rationally reconstructing the intuitive pre-theoretical knowledge of competently speaking, acting and judging subjects" (Habermas, 1992, pg. 38). Cooke (1994) summarizes Habermas' notion of post-metaphysical philosophical trends as having "replaced foundationalism with fallibilism" with regard to valid knowledge and how it may be achieved. The types of mystical claims by Wilber, Cohen, and others noted above chafe with these principles of the post-metaphysical stance because they veer into foundationalism and ultimate truths and speak with an illocutionary force of certainty that ignores fallibilism. In the larger context of the body of work of both Wilber and Cohen, they do appreciate and embody the principles of post-metaphysics, but here we consider the many instances in which they do not.

Wilber and Cohen use terms such as infinity, timeless, omnipresent, primordial, non-dual, and universal in their claims about the essential nature of reality. It seems impossible to validate such claims using modern reasoning, especially to those who do not share the experiences they are derived from. It seems they can only be justified in terms of special access to knowledge from authorities via “intuition.” Such foundational statements are not beholden to principles of experience, logic, nor deliberative consensus (they are usually non-falsifiable in the Popperian sense (Popper, 1979)). There is little problem with this for individual belief and discourse “within the choir,” but again our
concern is about broader discourse. According to Cooke (1994, p. ix) unexamined personal or cultural assumptions about the nature of reality can lead to "repressive metaphysical projections,” and this is one reason to value truth claims that are framed to naturally invite open and critical discourse.

The post-metaphysical pill can be a hard one to swallow. As I will discuss later in the section on Epistemic Drives, the metaphysicists among us, and the metaphysicist impulses within each of us, might need a variety of different lines of reasoning to relax the need for the certainty, essentialism, and purity associated with metaphysical claims. Here (as I have in more detail in Murray 2013) I argue that, though rigorous efforts must be made to clarify terms (concepts) and justify claims (statements), one must also acknowledge that indeterminacy in concepts, statements, and models/theories is, to some degree, natural and *unavoidable*, and a great deal of this fallibility must be "coped with" rather than solved or debated. In the post-post-modern milieu sources of fallibility should be made transparent and woven into discourse rather than ignored.

**Embodied Knowledge and the Symbolic Impulse**

Thinking and knowledge production are embodied activities. This might seem obvious to some, but according to Lakoff & Johnson its implications have gone unnoticed throughout the history of philosophical thought. In their explanation of "Embodied Realism" and their critique of most of the history of philosophical thought, they say:

> Reason is not disembodied [but] arises from the nature of our brains, bodies, and bodily experience [such that] every structure of reason…comes from the details of our embodiment, [from] the same neural and cognitive mechanisms that allow us to perceive and move around. […]Reason is not 'universal' in the transcendent sense; that is, it is not part of the structure of the universe. It is [however] a structure shared universally by all human beings…there is no Cartesian dualistic person with a mind separate and independent from a body. […]Reason is not
radically free [and] we have no absolute freedom in Kant's sense...no full autonomy...the utilitarian [economically rational] person does not exist...phenomenological introspection alone [can not] discover everything there is to know about the mind...there is no...decentered subjective...poststructuralist person...for whom all meaning is arbitrary, totally relative, and purely historically contingent, unconstrained by body and brain. (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999 pp. 4-8.)

The embodied nature of mind leads to a number of sources of fallibility and indeterminacy (uncertainty, unknowing, imprecision, and systematic error) that directly impact mystical and metaphysical claims, and the definiteness with which they can be made. We increasingly understand how the mind acts as a lens or filter in its perception and understanding of reality. This understanding can lead to a humility and the "negative capability" to tolerate (and even enjoy) uncertainty, unknowing, ambiguity, and paradox; to support a knowing that there is much that we don't and will never know. This understanding can also, in a compatible way, allow for new levels of awareness, wisdom, and self-correction (a "positive capability"); as if knowing the shape of the lens or the color of the filter that one is looking through empowers one to make adjustments, or at least to include useful information about possible sources of error and uncertainty along with one's claims. Here I will mention some of these sources of fallibility and indeterminacy that allow for a more sophisticated treatment of metaphysical and mystical beliefs (and all beliefs).

Cognitive science is documenting intrinsic sources of error at all of the levels mentioned in Table 1. At the level of experience (and perception), studies of sensory illusions and biases in memory expose fallibilities at the pre-linguistic level (Travis & Aronson 2007; Wilson 2002). We will skip the level of concepts here because we focus on it in detail below. At the level of statements, studies of "bounded rationality" and cognitive biases show how peoples' conclusions and inferences are prone to a large
number of systematic errors and biases (for example, "loss aversion" and "confirmation bias") such that our supposedly rational and logical thought processes are neither (see Kahneman et al., 1982; Gigerenzer & Selten, 1999; Gladwell, 2002; Meyers, 2002; Sunstein, 2002; Shermer, 2011b). For work specifically addressing how emotions influence reason see Goleman (1995), Damasio (1999), Matthews et al. (2002), and Fischer et al. (1990). There are also analyses of fallibility at the level of models and theories (e.g. Kuhn's (1970) study of paradigm shifts in science, and Latour's (1993) ethnographic studies of the scientific method).

All of this scholarship shows that no thought process or speech act is purely "rational" in the classic sense and that unconscious and emotional processes introduce systematic distortions into reason and decision-making. Importantly, research shows that academics, experts, highly intelligent people, and, one must assume, philosophers and mystics, are not at all immune from these fallibilities.

Fallibility at the level of concepts is particularly important to an understanding of the nature of metaphysical and mystical beliefs. Researchers have shown how the nature of concepts differs from what we normally assume about them. Conceptual categories split the world into parts, simultaneously joining parts into categories. When we employ the knife or the glue of the concept, important truths or nuance can get left on the cutting room floor, so to speak, and troublesome grey areas can be ignored. The mind (or we could say, the symbolic nature of language) has a tendency to treat conceptual boundaries as black-and-white, as well-defined boxes that things either fall within or outside of—but this is almost never the case. Research reveals concepts to be "graded," meaning they have fuzzy boundaries and, especially for the abstract concepts brought up in
metaphysics, admit to a "metaphorical pluralism" in which different metaphorical senses make up the full understanding of a concept (Mervis & Rosch 1981; Lakoff & Johnson 1999). The metaphors that underlie a particular concept can be incompatible or contradictory and yet we unreflectively jump from one metaphorical basis to another. Lakoff and Johnson show how philosophical treatments of time, causality, truth, consciousness, ethics, freedom, etc., are radically indeterminate because at every turn the metaphorical sense of the word is swapped out to fit the argument being made. The symbolic impulse is thus a tendency of thought that biases one to perceive or interpret phenomena as conceptually simple and determinate in structure, despite the graded and pluralistic nature of concepts. The symbolic impulse is exacerbated in contexts that involve emotional charge, importance, or ego attachment, and in any context that "downshifts" cognition to more primitive processing.

These conclusions from cognitive science illustrate the “fallibility” of knowledge that underlies the post-metaphysical stance and problematizes metaphysical claims.

**Epistemic Drives**
The symbolic impulse to treat the conceptual boundaries between abstract concepts as simple and definitive is one of a number of tendencies that I will call "epistemic drives"—natural and universal tendencies of thought that influence what we think is true or real (see Murray, 2013). The term *drives* calls attention to the embodied nature of reason. These drives are unconscious and pervasive, yet manageable. As with biological drives to eat (or over-eat), sexually flirt, become angry when challenged, etc., our lives are improved when we reach a stage of development in which we are aware of and can control or compensate for epistemic drives (i.e., when subject becomes object for any
given drive). As with biological drives, we never completely outgrow or eliminate epistemic drives; since they can raise their heads unexpectedly in many contexts, calling for an ongoing awareness and cognitive management. In addition to the *symbolic impulse*, I will describe other epistemic drives below that bear directly on metaphysical and mystical beliefs (note that these drives are interrelated, not distinct.) (See more on epistemic drives in Murray, 2012.)

*Misplaced concreteness* is the tendency to treat an abstract concept as if it had physical reality (Whitehead, 1929). It is a consequence of the fact that the development of the human mind has its foundation in concrete physical interactions and needs (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Clark 1996; Varela et al. 1993). There seems to be something deep and strong within us that wants to treat abstract concepts (e.g. democracy, African-American, god, ego, compassion, spirit, evolution, Eros, subjectivity) as if they somehow really existed in the way that we perceive them, or that they represent a-priori categories in nature. Metaphysical thinking is also infused with epistemic drives such as the *desire for certainty* (and the avoidance of uncertainty and cognitive dissonance) and the ubiquitous *need to make meaning* from our experiences and information. We can imagine an interior ecology of epistemic drives at work, competing for attention and keeping each other in check (as do classical "drives" for things such as hunger, status, comfort, reproduction, territoriality, etc.). We can assume in others, but more importantly feel within ourselves, additional drives toward oneness, completeness, wholeness, generality, essentiality, permanence, predictability, perfection, and purity at work in mystical claims such as those mentioned above. We can also identify opposing drives toward multiplicity, partiality, concreteness, change, specificity, and differentiation, that operate within the
overall "ecology" (which philosophers such as Latour and Derrida emphasize). However, it is the former list that seems most energized in metaphysical claims.

Russell, in his appreciative critique of mystical beliefs, said that they were more about “feelings” and “attitudes” than “creeds” or truths. Some of these feelings are related to “drives” that can be sometimes useful and sometimes biasing or even have addictive qualities. We can identify these drives or urges working within us at the level of felt experience. There is a sense of ease, certainty, and mastery when we can ignore details and differences and trust a sturdy generality. We get a certain satisfaction from ordering things or collecting them into tidy groups. There is a sense of elegance and wholeness when we can embrace many things into a circle of unity, and a sense of power in understanding the essential or universal. The inquisitive and meaning-hungry mind wants to know the causal root, foundation, source, or origin of things. Acknowledging the presence of such drives does not invalidate any particular claim, but as with the star-struck lover describing the beauty of her beloved, or the known hypochondriac self-diagnosing a disease, one must take possible biases into serious account when evaluating claims. We can do the same for beliefs we hold and drives we sense within ourselves.

**Conclusion: On Meaning Generative Claims**

In a sense the history of metaphysical thought can be told in terms a succession of scientific understandings replacing metaphysical concepts (examples abound in physics and biology). In this interpretation metaphysics can be seen as man's attempt to make meaning of that which cannot be observed or measured. We have an extremely strong need (epistemic drive) to construct reasonable explanations for the important phenomena we observe. Since there will always be phenomena beyond our current comprehension,
man will continue to adopt metaphysical beliefs, even in a so-called post-metaphysical milieu. For example, physicists have created the place-holder concepts of "dark matter" and "dark energy" in attempts to make meaning of cosmic phenomena we don't yet understand. Even the terms "life" and "disease" may someday be seen as quaint metaphysical constructs holding place for a future deeper understanding.

In the case of mystical insights into ideas that are about consciousness, subjectivity, life force, spirituality, death, and other ideas that are more about the human condition than the inanimate physical world, we may never find adequate non-metaphysical explanations. And assuming that esoteric experiences like "spiritual awakening" remain rare, we will continue to grapple with how to convey the insights gleaned in such states to others.

Though metaphysical ideas will persist, we can still strive to avoid degrees or styles of certainty, bias, or foundationalism that are outmoded by an emerging, post-metaphysical, post-post-modern ("integral") understanding of the fallibility of knowledge and the embodied nature of reason. This will make important insights less easy to dismiss and ignore. In the post-metaphysical milieu we can no longer allow for the possibility of direct contact with "reality" or "true knowledge" by some privileged few. We can, however, allow for rare experiences of, or perspectives on, unusual or "deeper" aspects of reality that are acquired through esoteric practices or through extraordinary skill or capability. We can allow that some have greater ability to minimize bias and distortion in perception and reason, and thus can be trusted to understand reality more clearly (though none are immune from the many sources of bias and distortion inherent in embodied thought). From the vantage of many who study Perennial Philosophy and spirituality it
would appear that spiritual adepts (and other great thinkers of history) are experiencing similar phenomena and having similar insights. They seem to share the taste of that "chocolate" that is the "one taste" that Wilber refers to. But one must give primacy to the experience over its (symbolic) interpretation. The metaphysical essences and phenomena, and the conceptual models built using them, are of course imperfect maps, still useful to guide new experience and understanding.

Integralists often note that "the map is not the territory" and then go on to explain how we need good maps to navigate our complex world. This admission of fallibility or indeterminacy is too often a closure to preempt common concerns, and to rarely an opening into deeper questions. Here I have explored embodiment and indeterminacy so that one can more deeply and precisely exactly understand how (and why) maps and the abstract objects they are built up from differ from the territory. Thus we can be more skillful makers and users of such maps and more post-metaphysical consumers of mystical knowledge. In the above I offer perspectives that argue for both the value and the fallibility of mystical statements. However, I have yet to describe ways to understand and communicate their value in a post-metaphysical milieu.

To that end, as a final brief topic I suggest that "meaning generativity" can be used as a type of validity mode where scientific/evidential modes of validation do not apply (see Murray, 2012). Most metaphysical and mystical claims are not so much arguably true (nor ethically right nor aesthetically beautiful) as they are highly meaning-generative for an individual or group. That is, they have significant explanatory force or ability to generate meaning. The concept of meaning-generativity can help one assert and

7 In Murray 2012a I describe how meaning-generative claims differ from and complement the classical partition of validity claims into truth, ethical, and aesthetic claims; each of which calls for a different form of justification and explanation.
promote metaphysical and mystical ideas with sufficient forcefulness while still communicating a post-metaphysical or reflective stance that acknowledges the fallibility of ideas.

For example, I happen to "believe in" reincarnation, though I have no direct empirical experience supporting it. Reincarnation counteracts existential despair, is held by people I admire, and coordinates well with a number of other beliefs and intuitions I have. I do not expect to or need to convince anyone that reincarnation is real, nor justify how it works. The same approach can be taken with the teleological "evolutionary spirituality" perspective on human development promulgated by Wilber and Cohen, i.e. that "the universe is evolving—through us." This Eros-based belief has strong meaning-generative power for many. But to have to "prove" it in any logical way is impossible and beside the point. It is not merely a moral/ethical/normative claim, it has the flavor of a truth claim.

The suggestion here is not to de-value rigor but to provide a valid alternative justification mode that allows us to differentiate when we need scientific rigor (or modernist forms of rationality) and when we don't. In this way one is not forced to abandon meaning-rich metaphysical insights just because they can not be argued for in classically rational ways. Explicitly opening up meaning-generativity as a way to justify metaphysical beliefs may help ease the important dialogues that need to take place between the scientifically-oriented and the spiritually/mystically-oriented (individuals and parts of ourselves). It removes the hard claims about reality that repel the scientific minded and gives them a palatable frame for considering the wisdom available in metaphysical beliefs.
References


