

26 Nondual Being: Unity

A still life taking place by itself. [#699]

[. . .] like a single accordion playing itself, with no musician nor an audience. [#1682]

Only an all-encompassing “object,” “a self-nature that flows without time,”
that is constantly transforming (unstable) and shapes
everything through its form, is present. [#2426]

[. . .], being dissolved, no thoughts, unifying sensation of everything around me,
as if out beyond the horizons, the mental ones too. [. . .] a no-longer-being
overall and yet Present in everything. [#2537]

There are many ways of trying to verbally convey the experience of pure awareness. One frequent strategy involves describing it not as pure awareness, but as pure *being*—for example, as a nondual phenomenal experience of existence per se. One Transcendental Meditation (TM) practitioner has said, “It’s pure being. It is is-ness, pure am-ness. It is the essential nature of existence.”¹ One difficult question is to what extent the phenomenological profiles of “nondual awareness” and “nondual being” overlap, and whether a full double dissociation is possible. Can either exist completely without the other?

Depending on the context, it is conceivable that two meditators might refer to one and the same type of experience either as “pure awareness” or as “pure being” and, vice versa, that different experiences may be described using the same verbal labels. Here, we clearly need more unbiased research involving a phenomenological approach that has been liberated from any doctrinal background. This chapter and chapter 27 will take a first step toward the goal of understanding how “nondual awareness” and “nondual being” relate to each other. Let us begin with the phenomenology of existence, the experience of pure being in and of itself.

Our reports show that the phenomenology of “pure being” can either be the sole defining characteristic of a full-absorption episode or coexist with other forms of experiential content. Next, you will find nine examples of the phenomenal quality that I am trying to isolate here. Note that some of the descriptors explored in earlier chapters—like “body dissolution,” “peace,” “silence,” “weightlessness,” “ineffability,” “simplicity,” “nonduality,” “timelessness,” and the “invisible smile”—recur frequently in this new context:

80 [. . .] Perhaps one can best describe it as “simply being,” and metaphorically as “peaceful and weightless.”

521 In meditation I sometimes experience simply “being” without additional modalities, pure being in itself; I cannot say much more about this, because there is nothing to say about it in descriptions. To a certain extent, the perception of one’s own existence without the observer role and without mental activity, perhaps one could say—as if the pause between the thoughts grows very long, but without waiting.

1316 [. . .] Deep silence, the feeling of simply being Pure Being [*Reines Sein*], completely beyond any individuality. [. . .] sometimes the perception that existence [*Sein*] is completely flat, without the slightest additional perception, sometimes also the experience of dynamism in the silence. [. . .]

1378 [. . .] The flow of thoughts came almost to a standstill, so that only a quiet awareness of one’s own being was left. Then a feeling of silence stabilized, complete presence and agreement with what is, a feeling of the perfection of the moment and of emotional balance. Then the space opened up to an infinity in which a pure existence was possible. [. . .]

1424 [. . .] It is a realm of complete silence. Simplicity. There is nothing there that needs to be expressed, communicated, or evaluated. The simplest possible being.

1625 [. . .] All of a sudden the feeling changed and I plunged into something that I would call complete being. I as a subject no longer existed, all I felt was the great, all-encompassing being of which I was a part. There was neither an outside nor an inside, but only the boundless whole. Time no longer played a role either and it seemed to be an eternal state. [. . .]

1795 In pure awareness I always experience a lightness. [. . .] I am simply there, exist and know that I exist. Nothing more. Observing this conjures up a soft smile at the corners of my mouth. [. . .]

1898 My experience was the pure happiness brought to me by simply being. There was no me, no pain, no need.

1195 I sit and I am. Am who I am. Upright and penetrating everything infinitely far, embracing everything. There is neither boundary nor separation. All “others” and all phenomena are part of my oneness or universe. It is exhilarating and yet very simple, because it is still and empty. [. . .] “I” is only being, it’s not personal.

One interesting detail is that reports of the experience of pure, nondual being involve more frequent use of CAPITALS than reports of other types of experience:

1261 Transcendental experiences cannot be described, one simply IS.

2870 It’s like when the kisser and the kissed merge in the kiss. Neither one nor the other. It IS. It penetrates the ALL, the NOTHING, and fuses into one single BEING.

3243 [. . .] suddenly a consciousness of total boundlessness. It is very difficult to think of another word for it. There was neither body nor thought, feeling . . . just “BEING.” I returned from this state with the awareness (now also figurative) of the whole universe, then being a particle and feeling a body again. While walking I stopped, looked at the sky, a bird flew by. The feeling of just “BEING” appeared again. [. . .]

3304 [. . .] deep moments of calm and of simply just BEING, in which I perceive sounds only very fuzzily and my body seems to “dissolve.” [. . .]

2487 There was a moment in the middle of nature—I was in the forest and suddenly I had a moment of ONENESS. There was no differentiation between hearing, seeing, feeling. Everything was self-evidently there and self-evident, with no need to change anything. It was light, boundless, and full of peace. [. . .]

As explained at the start of this chapter, what nondual awareness and nondual being have in common is that they lack subject/object structure. There is no self in opposition to some reified content of experience. The experience of pure being is clearly a nondual state in this sense, simply because there is no distinct, knowing self. To use the new conceptual instrument offered in chapter 25, there is no epistemic agent model; hence the distinction between subject and object doesn’t exist. Being nondual, the experience of pure being cannot be fabricated and is easily destroyed by even the faintest form of clinging or attachment:

924 I experienced a moment of being. The moment I noticed that, it was already gone.

2240 I experienced a break in the tension of meditation and directing awareness and a dense, dark, and warm expansiveness of being crept over me. My body was breathing itself and moving itself and being was just occurring. I have

experienced this state several times with meditation, it spontaneously occurs and shortly thereafter dissipates as my sense of self returns and tries to claim or investigate and normally prolong the state of mind which seems to destroy it.

Ego dissolution and becoming one with the world are processes that cannot be actively constructed or directly accessed by any meditation technique. They often occur spontaneously, outside formal meditative practice (see chapters 10 and 32). Of course, a dissolution of the sense of self is one of the classical phenomenological descriptors for advanced meditative states, and it is important to be very clear about what concepts like “selfless” or “nonegoic” really mean if applied in the context of conscious experience (more about this in chapter 29). Many theories of “ego dissolution” have been constructed over the centuries.² But from time to time, one has to liberate oneself from the idealized conceptual frameworks and face the messiness of contemplative experience. It is of vital importance that we look at phenomenological reports written by *real* meditators in the *real* world. If we do so, and investigate ego dissolution in the context of pure being, holism, and unity, what we find is not at all clear cut. Phenomenologically, there seems to be a whole spectrum of conscious states or modes that can be described as “selfless”.³

3068 [. . .] a moment in which all self-feeling had dissolved and I was walking in the forest (i.e., not a sitting meditation, not a specific walking meditation). Everything was a big . . . self-updating process. Timeless, almost dimensionless, in a way, empty, and yet every particle of “my experience” was somehow connected with every other particle, a wholeness. With no point of identity to which I could have referred. At the same time, there was a part of my self that was afraid of this (of losing myself in it, of going crazy, etc.). This part was not so much in the foreground, however, and made up perhaps a fifth of my experience.

A large subset of reports emphasizes the quality of existential unity, of becoming *one* with everything that exists. Sometimes this is preceded by a “softening” or a mild dedifferentiation of the phenomenal field. This process of existential unification may start locally (as related to a specific perceptual object or a single sensory modality), but it can then turn into a global, all-encompassing experience. Again, though, we should not jump to interpretations and conclusions too quickly. If we take the phenomenology seriously, it becomes clear that there is a rich and differentiated spectrum of states that can be described using terms like “unity” and “nondual being.” To demonstrate this abundance, I will close this phenomenological section by simply presenting seventeen examples without further comment:

- 3219 During a meditation became completely one with a tree. A most extraordinary unexpected event.
- 1215 While peeling carrots, the difference between carrot and me dissolved, I noticed the connection, and being in the here and now, that was very impressive. I experience such phenomena very often in nature and in connection with people.
- 1918 [. . .] After my morning practice I was looking at a leaf which exploded / opened up a new world—I was it / it was I. [. . .]
- 2426 The outstanding characteristic of my experience was a radically changed perception of reality (through a kind of fusion with the wind and the trees and their movement; dissolving of boundaries) through to a perception without different objects or subject. Only an all-encompassing “object,” “a self-nature that flows without time,” that is constantly transforming (unstable) and shapes everything through its form, is present. [. . .] and [I] tried to imagine what a world could look like in which everything is connected, permeated by fields and constantly changing, without individuality. I also did one of my meditation exercises in between. Every time I noticed that I was focused on something, I tried to let it go. When I looked at the trees moving in the wind, I had the feeling of merging with them and with my surroundings. There were no more boundaries or different objects. Just one thing, the everything that is changing. [. . .]
- 1937 [. . .] the phenomenological field of sound/sense/weight/touch softened to a point of disintegration into a hyper awareness of “be-ing.” Unity and nothingness at once, perfectly balanced. [. . .]
- 2107 [. . .] I was alone outside in a small meadow surrounded by pine and aspen trees. I was sitting with eyes open and paying attention to my breath. At some point it felt like all of my senses (of body, of sight, touch, smell, and sound) dissolved into one open awareness of being and there was no separation between me and the trees and the air around me. It was all just happening.
- 2206 [. . .] the concept of a “cloud of sensation.” It began when I lost the feeling that certain subjects of consciousness (i.e., hearing, feeling) were connected to a location. Instead, all there was was a cloud of sensation. In that moment that was all “I” was.
- 3186 [. . .] For me, it is best expressed like this: “I become all that is.” So not even the connection with everything that is. Instead, pure being. The touch and the encounter with your own soul. Simply beautiful and not comparable to anything on earth. Pure joy.

2411 My experiences have been in a wakeful state and have been characterized by a stable and extended felt sense of being aware of being aware in that particular place and time. It entailed a heightened sense of unity, of being a part of all that was in the moment. Thoughts, sensations, and emotions were present but felt fluid and seemed to emanate from myself, which simultaneously felt at one with all that was.

3403 All inner voices fell silent, there was neither future nor past, neither fears nor worries, in the here and now it was possible to experience pure being, the all-embracing context was more important than the individual, the latter receded into the background in favor of a higher synthesis, faded and lost its independence . . .

2804 [. . .] I feel totally content. There are no desires, no wishes, no body, no pain, no needs, just pure being. Then after a while consciousness expands to include what's outside the house we are sitting meditating in. Wind, birds, trees are now part of my experience of a flow of free energy. Everything is the same. Everything is movement and change. And in that moment, I am part of all that.

1190 A perception in waking consciousness of the complete unity of one's own self with all objects of contemplation around it. 100 percent bliss. A perception of absolute silence inside amidst the hustle and bustle all around. [. . .]

2943 A feeling of warmth and brightness streaming through. The body was no longer necessarily consciously present. There was spacelessness and weightlessness, lightness. I was very present, but not there. I felt simultaneously very centered and expansive. I felt gratitude, realization. Pure existence.

2354 [. . .] and I was very suddenly powerfully overcome with the feeling that I was no longer looking out at an open field and mountains that surrounded it on a beautiful sunny day, but that I *became* the open field, the mountains, and the beautiful sunny day. There was also a unity of consciousness that I had never experienced prior to this. The lines between the experiences of bodily sensations, sights, sounds, emotions, and even thoughts became blurred into oneness. It was no longer a feeling of "That's a sensation, which is separate from a sound." It was a feeling of "This is consciousness—all of it. There's no special distinction between any of the specific contents of consciousness." It was one of the most powerful experiences of my life, and I'd put it in the top 10 most life-altering experiences I've ever had.

2244 [. . .] It's as if the entire world and myself merge and I am simply the center of everything. Words drop away. Fear is not present because the me is gone. A

greater feeling of openness is there. I feel large . . . as large as the entirety of my knowledge of the world while knowing that I'm also that which I don't know (hard to explain). No sense of separateness but at the same time I feel like I am the center of a center-less universe.

1682 The experience "felt" (for a lack of a better word) like pure peace. Everything felt irrelevant and unimportant. My awareness was so anchored in the present moment, as if I had a sudden amnesia of my past memories. There were no plans for the future, my brain was not trying to predict what was going to happen the next moment. It was completely focused in my surroundings and in my breathing. My breathing was so constant, rhythmic, and harmonic that it felt connected with the air coming in and out of my lungs. I suddenly couldn't tell the difference between what "I" was doing and what the environment was causing on my body, as if the air was the one causing my body to breathe. It stopped being a cause-and-effect relationship and felt more like a single accordion playing itself, with no musician nor an audience. The breathing in my body "was," I wasn't controlling it anymore, it just "happened." When I lost this boundary, I lost any responsibility of my body and a feeling of peace became apparent. As if it were always there but I was first finding it.

2431 And it was as if I woke up in a different state. I felt transparent and one with all around me, I understood the trees the wind as if they were me and I was them. Was calm knowing, but when I realized I couldn't wake up out of this state I started to worry a bit. But as I could function normally, walked back to my car and sat at a terrace ordering coffee, then this state slowly passed by.

Seelengrund and "Groundless Ground"

Understand: all our perfection and all our bliss depends on our traversing and transcending all creatureliness, all being and getting into the ground that is groundless.

—Meister Eckhart (1260–1328), Sermon *Adolescens, tibi dico: Surge*

Let us turn once again to the ancient fable of the elephant and the blind. What would happen if the king had the power to bring together not only all the blind-born from his own kingdom, but also those from all other countries of the Earth, including those from different religious creeds? What if the king could ask people from different historical epochs, people who had never known each other? Would they still converge on at least some aspects of what the elephant is like? The second part of this chapter is about the phenomenological aspect of minimal phenomenal experience (MPE)

that—for many centuries—has been described as a “groundless ground,” the “foundationless foundation” of all experience. To widen our perspective on the phenomenology of nondual being, I invite you to follow me in looking at a range of sources from different times and places, like Meister Eckhart’s concept of the *Seelengrund* (ground of the soul) and the Tibetan Buddhist concepts of *gzhi'i gzhi med* (groundless ground) and *gnas med gnas* (foundationless foundation). Our whistle-stop tour will be guided by my philosophically motivated hypothesis that the human self-model might actually not (as I suggested in earlier publications) bottom out in invariances of interoception and elementary bioregulation,⁴ but might instead bottom out in emptiness, in an indeterminate phenomenology of mere epistemic capacity that is neither self nor no-self. Perhaps it even turns out that there is an additional fact, a phenomenological sense in which the conscious self-model is not only groundlessly grounded, but actually *sculpted* out of the epistemic openness of MPE?

Begine of Hadewijch—also known as Hadewijch of Antwerp or as Hadewijch of Brabant—was a thirteenth-century philosopher–poet and mystic. She was part of a religious movement that began in the High Middle Ages and is known as the European *Frauenmystik*. Hadewijch probably lived in the Duchy of Brabant and was one of the first Western mystics to use the two terms of “ground” (*gront* in Middle Dutch) and “groundlessness” (*grondeloosheit*). We do not know much about Hadewijch, but her famous *Book of Visions* was probably composed between 1236 and 1245, and it describes dialogues between herself and Christ, using them as a form of religious teaching. At the end of her thirteenth vision, she describes how she was “overwhelmed by delight”⁵ and then fell into a “groundless depth” (*grondelose diepte*). She describes “floating away from the mind” and says that the hour during which all of this happened will remain forever beyond words and language. In reporting her fourteenth vision, she writes about “tasting the one nature” and experiencing “one single taste (of one nature)” (*in ere naturen smake*).⁶ This sounds a lot like the notion of “one taste” or “one flavor” in Tibetan Buddhism (Tibetan *ro gcig*; Sanskrit *ekarasa*; see note 78 of this chapter for an example). For Hadewijch, this capacity to taste the one nature is a capacity that you can possess only if you have “experienced human and divine love as one being” and if you have become “undivided, inseparable, and completely one with the Godhood (*godheit*) that streams through oneself and in turn have begun to stream through it.”⁷ In her eighteenth prose letter, Hadewijch of Antwerp relates the groundless ground to the deepest level of the soul itself: The soul is an entity or a being that is visible to God and to which God is visible.⁸ The soul is an “entity without ground,”⁹ in which God is “fully sufficient to and for himself”—and the soul in turn finds its own self-sufficiency within him.¹⁰ And God liberates, opening the path through which the soul “passes into freedom, in his ground, which cannot be reached unless she reaches it with her own depth.”¹¹

In German, *Grund* (ground) and *Abgrund* (abyss) are closely related words, just as in Hadewijch's Middle Dutch we have *gront* and *afgront* and Meister Eckhart's Middle German speaks of *grunt* and *abgrunde/abgrunt*. Accordingly, in Meister Eckhart, we also find the *abgrunt sîner gotheit* (the "abyss of Godhood"),¹² as well as the *groundeloese gotheit* (the "groundless Godhood").¹³ English translations of *abgrunt* as an "abyss" or a "bottomless pit" make this relation invisible. Interestingly, in Middle Latin, *abyssus* also meant not only an unfathomable depth, but also "space" (the *Weltenraum* in which disembodied souls may live) or simply "ocean." In her poems, Hadewijch says that the groundless ground of the soul is "deeper than the sea" and that one can actually "swim through it."¹⁴

Seelengrund, the ground of the soul, is a Western concept that is deeply related to the phenomenology described in this book in more ways than one. Just like the ancient Greek *ataraxia* (chapter 14) and the notion of "transparency" in early Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy (chapter 28), it is one of the few historical examples that I am offering you (from the many I could have chosen) not just as a source of inspiration, but also in an attempt to help you discover certain phenomenological parallels for yourself. For example, it is interesting to note that Hadewijch's notion of "self-sufficiency" actually appears in some of our participants' descriptions of pure awareness, as well as in the Buddhist context of "suchness." You may recall our discussion of the phenomenology of suchness (chapter 9), which allowed us to isolate the two experiential aspects of spontaneous, apparently uncaused self-manifestation and timeless self-evidencing. And the phenomenology of "nondual being" is directly related to the groundless ground of the soul, in which the medieval mystics found the liberating groundless ground of the Godhood itself.

It was Meister Eckhart (1260–1338) who introduced the concept of *Seelengrund* into the theological, philosophical, and spiritual debates of the Middle Ages.¹⁵ He was also known as Eckhart von Hochheim, and toward the end of his life, he was tried by Pope John XXII after being accused of heresy by the Franciscan-led Inquisition. Meister Eckhart was never personally condemned as a heretic, and in 1329—after Eckhart's death—John XXII issued a bull stating that Eckhart had recanted all his errors and false teachings by subjecting himself and his theological writings to the decision of the Apostolic See.

There are many reasons why *Seelengrund* is an interesting concept in the context of MPE—not least because (as can be seen in the epigraph at the start of this section) the ground Eckhart speaks of is a *groundless* ground. He says that rationality and reason (*vernünffticheit*)¹⁶ are unable to grasp the nature of God because they can grasp it only as it is known within them, but not "in the sea of its groundlessness" (*in dem mer sîner gruntlôsicheit*).¹⁷ We find the two semantic elements of fundamentality and nonreifiability

combined here: A ground is a foundation, something your soul can stand on, but—just like the sky above—the sea is something unbounded, not a well-defined perceptual object that could be juxtaposed with a knowing self. Eckhart’s treatment also links to our more abstract discussion of the possibility that the phenomenal self-model “bottoms out in epistemic openness,” sharing a common baseline with the computational self-model that creates the totality of our conscious world (as suggested in chapter 24).

Of the *Seelengrund*, Eckhart says this: “Here, God’s ground is my ground and my ground God’s ground” (*Hie ist gotes grunt mîn grunt und mîn grunt gotes grunt*).¹⁸ The philosophical point is that knowing God is a form of self-knowledge. What is more, the way in which Eckhart describes the *Seelengrund* also directly resonates with many of the phenomenological themes that emerged from our meditators’ reports: unboundedness, silence, nonidentification, presence, “coming home,” nothingness, emptiness and fullness, timelessness, ego dissolution, nondual being, “the true self that knows itself,” and so on. As we will see, in the context of pure awareness and the reports presented in this book, the idea of *Seelengrund* also possesses great intuitive beauty and force: It may offer another interesting way of describing what, experientially, pure awareness is all about—making contact with the groundless ground of the soul.

For Meister Eckhart, the *Seelengrund* is something into which human knowledge can never penetrate. The *Seelengrund* shares many features with pure consciousness, as described in Eastern religions, and also with MPE, as described by the meditators whose reports are presented in this book. I have extracted some examples for you: The *Seelengrund* is nameless (*namelôs*); it is simple and ineffable and lacks definable qualities (*wiselos*); it is characterized by silence and motionlessness of the soul (*stille; ruowe der sêle*); it is unified without a second (*einvaltec*) and unborn (*ungeborn*); it has detachment (*gescheidenheit*), unidentified with anything in time or space, with any mental images or forms; and of course, it has purity (*lûterkeit; pûrheit*). It is not tended or inclined (*geneiget*) in any direction; it is absolutely fundamental; it is the innermost ground, the ground of being, of heart and mind (*grunt*); it normally has a hidden and secret quality (*verborgen; heymeliche*)—but it is also luminous because the soul is a pure light in itself (*dem lûtern liehte, daz si in ir selber ist*).^{19,20}

All forms of imagination and conceptual thought are excluded from the *Seelengrund*. It is not a thing. It has no temporal or spatial properties, and it was never created. It is not even immortal in the traditional sense because there was never a time at which it didn’t exist. Sometimes Meister Eckhart uses metaphors like the “little spark” (*vûnkelîn*) that fends off and turns away from everything that isn’t pure (*lûter*), or the “little fortress” (*bûrgelîn*) that defends against the same. These metaphors refer explicitly to only one part of the soul: The ground, the purest part, in which the Godhood

is permanently present. Because it is absolutely pure, nothing else is pure enough to ever enter it—except God Himself (*niht sô lûter, daz in der sêle grunt möhte komen wan got aleine*).²¹ God is fully present in the *Seelengrund* as something that already belongs to us and has always been our own. For Eckhart, the *Seelengrund* is the place where we can and must break through (*durchbrêchen*) from the level of things and manifoldness into the reality of nondual being, of Godhood. This breakthrough can then lead to what he called the *Gottesgeburt*, the birth of God within the soul itself—the soul becoming aware of the divine and eternal character of its very own nature, of something has always been there in its innermost core: the *Seelengrund*. The birth of God within the soul itself is God’s initiative, but (and this is one of Eckhart’s many provocative points) he also has no choice: If a human being creates the necessary preconditions—has created emptiness in herself (*itelkeit*), has annihilated herself in herself (*der [mensch] sich selben vernihtet hât in im selben*),²² and possesses a “well-practiced detachment” (*wolgeübete abegescheidenheit*)²³—then it actually becomes a *necessity* for God to pour Himself (*ergiezen*) into this empty vessel, or else He would cease to be God (*muoz sich got alzemâle ergiezen, oder er enist niht got*).²⁴

I think it should be obvious how a lot of this relates directly to our empirical and qualitative investigation of MPE, including in the aspects of nonidentification, ego dissolution, emptiness, luminosity, peace, and silence. A phenomenological reading of these medieval texts that abstracts away from Christian theology and the underlying metaphysical assumptions shaped by an ancient cultural context may reveal further unexpected parallels to contemporary reports given by practitioners of meditation today. Let us therefore now look at some of these features in more detail, while also listening to what some other mystics in the European Middle Ages were trying to convey.

In chapter 3, we investigated the experience of silence, stillness, and the zero-person perspective. Silence is acoustic emptiness or epistemic openness in the auditory domain, but the term is also used to convey a general simplicity and absence of any form of mental representation. David von Augsburg (ca. 1200–1272) speaks of the “silence of spiritual vastness” (*stille der geistlichen weide*), which also connotes a grazing land or meadow.²⁵ Meister Eckhart teaches that anyone who wants to enter the divine ground has to be completely silent (*muoz gar stille sîn*)²⁶ and detached from all images and forms (*gescheiden sîn von allen bilden [. . .] und formen*).²⁷ He says that the ground of the soul and the groundless ground of the Godhood mutually penetrate each other. Their degree of silence or calm (*ruowe*) determines the degree to which they can rest in each other: If the soul partly rests in him, he partly rests in the soul, and if it rests fully in him, he rests wholly in it (*Als vil diu sêle ruowet in gote, als vil ruowet got in ir. Ruowet si ein teil in im, sô ruowet er ein teil in ir; ruowet si alzemâle in im, sô ruowet er alzemâle in ir.*)²⁸

In passages reminiscent of classical ideas in Zen Buddhism, Eckhart teaches spiritual practitioners that they should love God in a “mindless” (*nichgeistig*) way, so their souls can be mindless and nakedly free of all mindedness—because so long as the soul takes the form of a mind, it has images. So long as it has images, it has mediation; and so long as it has mediation, it has neither unity nor simplicity.²⁹ Among the parallels that we find between the medieval Christian mystics and present-day contemplative practitioners (who are mostly inspired by Buddhist and other Indian philosophical systems) are the emphasis on calm and peace (chapter 2), silence and simplicity (chapters 3 and 16), spaciousness (chapter 23), unity (chapter 26), and arguably also the motifs of True Self (chapter 29) and of nonexperience (chapter 31).

In chapter 5, we looked at reports describing pure awareness as involving the phenomenal character of clarity. In his 1997 monograph on metaphor in late-medieval mysticism, Michael Egerding writes that Mechthild von Magdeburg (ca. 1207–1283) thought that a pure heart is what makes human being’s consciousness “as clear in itself as the sun” (*clar an im selber als die suñe*).³⁰ For David von Augsburg, who distinguishes among seven different levels of prayer, we must be sufficiently “clear” and “purely enlightened” (*klârlichen* and *lûterlichen erliuhtet*)³¹ to know God, and then we depend on his grace if we want to go further and transform ourselves “into clear clarity” itself (*in die klâre klârheit*).³² Meister Eckhart sometimes uses clarity as a metaphor for God, but he also speaks of the “clarity of the soul” (*klârheit sîner sêle*)³³ that can be a precursor to the *Gottesgeburt*. There also exists a degree of clarity that is unbearable to humans: Mechthild tells us that she is unable to receive God’s answer to her attempt to contact him, not only because it is so forceful and so groundless, but also because it is *überclar*.³⁴

In the early chapters of this book, we began to isolate a series of readings of what it could really mean for pure awareness to be “pure” (you will find a full list in chapter 34). The purity of pure consciousness is found in the Middle High German concepts of *luter* and *luterkeit*, and in many different contexts and applications. Purity of consciousness appears, for example, as “purity of meditation” in David von Augsburg (*lûterkeit der andaht*)³⁵ and as “purity of mind” (*louterkait des gaistz*) in Heinrich von Nördlingen.³⁶ Purity of consciousness also features in Eckhart’s teaching that the pure Godhood (*blôz lûter gotheit*)³⁷ can be grasped only beyond space and time, by the force of a soul that is detached and pure (*abegescheiden, lûter*),³⁸ and in his beautiful descriptions of the “pure clear light” (*lûter klârez lieht*)³⁹ and of a “light or pure spirit” (*ein lieht oder ein lûter geist*).⁴⁰ It also makes an appearance in the famous idea of the *luter pur clar Ein* that Eckhart offers in Sermon 83, referring to the undifferentiated “pure clear One.” The “pure clear light” may also remind one of Buddhist terms like “luminous mind” (*prabhāsvara-citta* or *ābhāsvara-citta* in Sanskrit; *pabhassara citta* in Pali), which

appears in numerous Mahayana texts and Buddhist tantras (e.g., as the “brightly shining mind” or “mind of clear light”). It is also reminiscent of the phenomenological term “luminosity,” which we encountered in chapter 18 (*prabhāsvaratā* in Sanskrit) and which is translated in Tibetan Buddhism as “luminosity,” “clear light,” or even “purity” itself (*’od gsal [ba]*, literally meaning “radiant clarity”). For Eckhart, luminosity can be embodied, and specifically in the form of clarity: There is an overflow of light in the ground of the soul that can flow into the body and “fill it with clarity” (*[Ü]bervlüzzicheit des liehtes, daz in der sêle grunde ist, daz übergiuzet sich in den lîchamen und wirt dâ von vol klârheit*).⁴¹ This short list of examples shows that not only clarity, but also purity, luminosity, and simplicity are classic, frequently recurring descriptors of contemplative phenomenology, in ancient Asia as well as in the European Middle Ages. Given that we also find them in our own data, it is plausible to assume the existence of what I will call a shared “phenomenological anchor.”

Coming back to the idea of “one taste” in Hadewijch of Antwerp and in Tibetan Buddhism, it is interesting to note that, as Waldschütz points out, gustatory metaphors—for example, Eckart’s “God in his own taste” (*got in sînem eigenen smacke*)⁴²—relate to a holistic form of knowing from the inside out, because they derive from the Latin *sapere*, which means both “to taste” and “to know.”⁴³ *Sapere* is related to *sapientia*, which means having insight or philosophical wisdom. We find many examples of gustatory metaphors in Christian mysticism. Mechthild von Magdeburg speaks of “tasting a nonconceptual and inconceivable sweetness” (*smekket ein unbegriffliche suessekeit*)⁴⁴ and Johannes Tauler reports on “a taste of eternity” (*ein smak der ewikeit*)⁴⁵. Meister Eckhart says that the person who is turned in on himself, so that he recognizes God in God’s own flavor and in God’s own ground, is freed of all created things and is locked within himself as in a true castle of truth (*Welher mensche nû in sich selber wirt gekeret, daz er bekennet got in sînem eigenen smacke und in sînem eigenen grunde, der mensche ist gevriêt von allen geschaffenen dingen und ist in im selber beslozen in einem wâren slozze der wârheit*).⁴⁶ This shows how contemplatives across different times and cultures have generated a whole range of perceptual analogies in the attempt to convey the ineffable, drawing not only on vision (as in “clear light”) or audition (“pure silence”), but also on the much more proximal and holistic experience of taste. However, in chapter 6, I pointed out that in our database of reports, the *state* of pure awareness is only rarely related to an abstract form of tasting or smelling via gustatory or olfactory metaphors—something that may be different for global *modes* of experience like nondual awareness (see chapter 27). The reasons for this remain unclear. On the other hand, as you may recall, we do find at least some examples of “deliciousness” and “sweetness” or “being satiated” in our reports. The general point is that taste will be an important future target for evidence-based

and finer-grained phenomenological research projects designed to relate patterns in statistical items to modality-specific metaphors found within qualitative data such as open-ended verbal descriptions.

In chapter 8, we discussed the phenomenology of nonidentification and the contraction principle. In a passage reminiscent of central themes in classical Indian philosophy (e.g., the fifth song of the *Bhagavad Gita*) like inner renunciation and desireless action (*niskāmakarma* in Sanskrit), Meister Eckhart says that “one has to learn to remain (inwardly) unbound in the midst of external action” (*Man sol daz lernen, daz man in den werken ledic sîn*).⁴⁷ In his eleventh sermon, Johannes Tauler characterizes detachment (*abegescheidenheit*) as purity, as nakedness (in the sense of being liberated from everything worldly), as a form of freedom that is not spoiled by images, and as silence (*luterkeit, blosheit, unverbildete friiheit und . . . swigen*).⁴⁸ Henry Suso (or Heinrich Seuse, 1295–1366), on the other hand, describes nonidentification as a state of “silent resting in which we have become detached from [the perceptual content delivered by] the outer senses” (*stille ruow und abegescheidenheit der ussren sinnen*).⁴⁹ Suso, a German Dominican friar and an important author in both Latin and Middle High German, was well known for defending Meister Eckhart’s legacy after he was posthumously condemned for heresy in 1329. Suso speaks of a detached version of insight, a way of looking into the inside that is free of identification (*mit einem abgeschieden inblik*).⁵⁰ He also amusingly distinguishes between the two extremes of detached nakedness (*abgescheidner blosheit*) and degenerate amusement (*schedlich Kurzweil*).⁵¹

“Nothingness” (chapter 16) occurs in too many medieval locations to document. Perhaps most famously, in Sermon 42, Eckhart says of God that he is an above-floating being and an over-being nothingness (*Er ist ein vber swebende Wesen vnd ein vberwesenden nitheit*).⁵² Eckhart’s lasting appeal comes partly from his creativity: He created many new concepts that did not exist in this specific form before and were unknown in Christian philosophy. *Seelengrund* is one of them;⁵³ *Istikeit* is another example.⁵⁴ You may remember that the term “suchness” appeared back in chapter 9, when we first encountered Aldous Huxley and his literary descriptions of a mescaline-induced state of *seeing what is*. In the short quote I presented there, Huxley asked himself: “*Istigkeit*—wasn’t that the word Meister Eckhart liked to use? ‘Is-ness.’” *Istikeit* (as it was really spelled) relates to the phenomenology of pure being, the overarching topic of this chapter, which is perhaps the deepest layer of conscious experience. In a metaphysical reading, suchness is a quality of the pure, uncreated, featureless being as it is in and of itself, holding itself in existence by its own nature.⁵⁵ Sometimes suchness even co-occurs with nothingness because it can involve a process of diffidence, of melting away and dissolving into the nature of God. Suchness can give way to a timeless form

of knowing “unborn is-ness” and “unnameable nothingness.” This is how Meister Eckhart puts it:

You should sink fully out of your youth and dissolve into his “hisness,” and your “yours” and his “his” should become so completely one “mine” that with him you eternally understand his unborn “is-ness” and his unnameable “nothingness.” (*Dv solt alzemal entsinken diner dînesheit vnd solt zer fliesen in sine sinesheit und sol din din und sin sin ein mîn werden als genzlich, daz dv mit ime verstandest ewiglich sin vngewordene istikeit vnd sin vngenannte nihtheit.*)⁵⁶

Eckhart sometimes uses “is” as a noun, for example when he speaks of the experience of “becoming and being a single Is.”⁵⁷ He also speaks of the *istikeit* of divine nature, to which God refers when he uses the pronoun “I,” and this is-ness is also what God’s true nature really is—it is he and only he who can be called an “Is” in this sense. God is more *istig* in all creatures than any creature is to itself, and God’s intelligence is more “inward” in all things and more intimate to each than these things are to themselves (*sît daz got in allen dingen ist vernünftlicliche und den dingen mê inne ist, dan diu dinc in selber sint*)⁵⁸—a statement that may remind some of the Koran, where Allah says that, whatever thoughts the inner self of man may develop, Allah is always “closer to him than (his) jugular vein.”⁵⁹ For Eckhart, the human soul and all things have *istikeit*—which is simply the presence of God. As God’s ground and the *Seelengrund* are one and the same ground, it is the shared quality of *istikeit* that the mystic tries to bring into conscious experience.⁶⁰ Perhaps most interestingly, the experience of pure, nondual being (exemplified in Eckhart’s metaphysics as *istikeit* or the *blôz lûter wesen*) is described as a groundless ground. Coming into the ground (*in den grunt ze komen*) is the deepest goal of everything that is, but it is impossible to find it outside of oneself. Coming into the ground can happen only by entering the innermost part of oneself in a state of pure humility (*in lûterer dêmueticheit*).⁶¹ Groundlessness, according to Meister Eckhart, refers to an unfathomable reality and to God in his bottomless depth (*in sîner grûndlosen tieffi*).⁶² Groundlessness also alludes to inconceivability, to the namelessness of the groundless God, and to the mysteriousness of the ways in which he moves. Eckhart’s notion of the *Seelengrund* (*grunt der sêle*) in turn influenced many other mystics and spiritual philosophers.

Let us also briefly look at what others said about the groundless ground of the soul. Even before Eckhart, David von Augsburg (1200–1272) already spoke of the “groundless Godhood” (*gruntlosen gotheit*) and the “groundless fullness” of human bliss (*gruntlose volle*);⁶³ this may remind you of material in chapter 15, “Joy, Awe, Bliss, and Gratitude,” and chapter 17, “Emptiness and Fullness.”

The monk Johannes Tauler (ca. 1300–1361) was an important disciple of Meister Eckhart, a Roman Catholic priest, and a theologian who also belonged to the Dominican order. He wrote about the “hidden abyss” (*verborgen appetgrunde*), in which the divine abyss and the abyss of the human soul turn toward and call to each other. This hidden abyss is the purest part, the innermost and most hidden ground of the soul, and through the practice of concentration and calm collectedness, the human mind has to “sink out of itself” (*entsunken*)⁶⁴ to lose itself in God as a drop of water does in the ocean. We should cultivate our *Seelengrund* like a farmer, Tauler writes, who removes the weeds from his field so that at one point, “created nothingness can sink into uncreated nothingness.”⁶⁵ Tauler points out that compassion can also have a quality of groundlessness, as well as suggesting that God’s lovingness is infinite and deep, something that we can move into (*in die vertieffete grundelose erbarmherzigkeit Gottes*).⁶⁶

For Suso, Eckhart’s breakthrough into the unknowable is more of a forceful impact, a kind of collision with divine nothingness—and he too speaks of the “groundlessness” of the ground, the ground that expunges all distinctions.⁶⁷ For him, however, reaching the state of unification is a question not of lawful necessity but of grace. Suso speaks poetically of the groundless ground “that opens itself in all loving hearts, like a rising morning star” (*Got gruesse dich, ufgender . . . morgenstern, von dem grundelosen grunde aller minnenden herzen!*).⁶⁸ You may recall that in the previous chapter, we explored the idea of “melting into the phenomenal field.” The phenomenological motif of “melting” was well known to European mystics, with both Tauler and Suso, for instance, speaking of sinking and melting into the uncreated mind of God and God being melted into the ground of one’s own heart. Tauler speaks of sinking and melting into the uncreated spirit of God (*versinken und vermseltzen in dem ungeschaffenen geiste Gottes*),⁶⁹ and Suso tells us that “God has to be melted into the ground of my heart” (*Gott in den grund mins herzen gesmelzet werden muß*).⁷⁰

A little later in this period, St. John of the Cross (1542–1591) was a Carmelite friar, a mystic, and a major figure of the Counter-Reformation in Spain. He called the ground of the soul *fondo del alma*, and interestingly, he even spoke of an “awakening” of God in the center of the soul and the ground of the soul.⁷¹ He taught that human beings in whom a unification with God had not yet happened were usually unaware of his presence in their very souls.

This experience of the actual presence of God in the *Seelengrund* became a common theme, including for the Christian nun Marie de l’Incarnation (1599–1672), who described her spiritual experiences in terms of “being strongly drawn into the ground of her interior/inside” and as “being completely withdrawn into the ground of the soul.” This ground was the center of the soul and the seat of God at the same time.⁷²

This last example ends our brief look at what some other medieval Europeans, following Begine of Hadewijch and Meister Eckhart, said about the groundless ground of the soul. I think that even this small selection shows how many phenomenological details found in our own data—but also more general experiential features like the motifs of ego dissolution, nondual being, and the existence of a foundationless foundation of experience—had already been described by the mystics of the Middle Ages.

But what about today? Today, the notion of a “groundless ground” is frequently found in the Buddhist pop culture that has evolved in the West, typically with no knowledge of its historical roots. As I have learned from David Higgins, one of the world’s leading experts in Tibetan Buddhism, if one actually searches the Tibetan canon (the massive collection of mostly Indic works translated into Tibetan), one finds no Indian precedents for the Tibetan terms *gzhi’i gzhi med* (groundless ground), *gnas med gnas* (foundationless foundation), or the like.⁷³ “Groundless ground” and related terms seem to be distinctively Tibetan concepts, possessing only distant roots in old philosophical speculations (in India, Tibet, and China) that there is a ground of experience beyond any of the metaphysical (ontic or epistemic) grounds established in the Buddhist philosophical schools. As I have also learned from Higgins, one of the prime examples of the groundless ground in Tibetan Buddhism is the Dzogchen (Great Perfection) tradition’s idea of a “primordial ground” (*gdod ma’i gzhi*) or “originary ground” (*ye gzhi*) that is claimed to be beyond or beneath the “substratum consciousness” (*ālaya-vijñāna*) of the Mind Only or “representation-only” school (*vijñapti-mātra*). This latter concept was posited to account for states of delusion but was unable to account for states/qualities associated with spiritual awakening. Interestingly, in ancient Tibet, this groundless ground is not a metaphysical ground established by the usual sources of valid knowledge but rather is a matter of existential, personal self-realization (*so sor rang rigpa’*, “personally realized self-awareness”; or *so sor rang rigpa’i ye shes*, “personally realized primordial knowing”).

As we have now confirmed multiple times, there is clearly a phenomenological dimension to the groundless ground (it can be viewed as a region in phenomenal state space), but at the same time, it defies any representation on the level of natural language. Perhaps future mathematical models of consciousness will be able to generate new solutions to this age-old problem.

As Higgins explains,

“The attempt to understand the ‘ground’ inescapably comes up against the limits of thought and language. We are confronted with the quixotic prospect of naming what is unnameable and conceiving the nonconceptual, all in an attempt to

understand an abiding ground that is nonetheless groundless in the dual senses of being unceasing and impermanent.”⁷⁴

Phenomenologically, one major aspect of the groundless ground is that it is experienced neither as existent nor as nonexistent (more about this in chapter 28). In their paradoxical formulations, Meister Eckhart and eminent Tibetan scholar–practitioners like the Eighth Karmapa strongly converge in what can be seen (again in the words of David Higgins) as

[. . .] an attempt to articulate an invariant continuum of being and awareness that is available to first-hand experience, but cannot be reduced to the oppositional categories of existence and non-existence and the extreme views of eternalism and nihilism based on these. [. . .] We might add that it is precisely because human experience is as heterogeneous and hierarchically stratified as it is that it remains radically underdetermined by what we make of it, lending itself to multiple descriptions without being definitely captured by any of them.⁷⁵

We began our journey in the fourteenth century, with Begine of Hadewijch of the European Middle Ages, but as it turns out, the idea of groundless ground can be found as early as the twelfth century in Tibet, for example in the work of Zhang rinpoche.⁷⁶ The philosophical idea that the nature of mind is without ground or source (*gzhi med rtsa bral*) is an established topic of discussion and well attested in the earliest Dzogchen traditions⁷⁷ long before Hadewijch of Antwerp felt compelled to give testimony of the *grondelose diepte* (“groundless depth”) that she experienced in another, distant part of the world. The Tibetan Buddhist notion of “one taste” or “one flavor” (*ro gcig*)⁷⁸ is another example of a geographically distant precursor to strikingly similar European ideas. *Ro gcig* encapsulates the idea of “tasting the one nature”—that is, experiencing or realizing all inner and outer phenomena (emptiness, bliss, nonduality, etc.) as being of a single nature. Both this and the closely related idea of having “one single taste (of one nature)” (*in ere naturen smake*)⁷⁹ are also found in Hadewijch’s writings.

Whatever the historical and philosophical details, many meditators will immediately see the beauty in poetic and paradoxical philosophical concepts like *Seelengrund*, in characterizations of pure awareness as the “ground of the soul” and “groundless ground.” I would also predict that for many meditators, they will make strong intuitive sense as well. Of course, the metaphysical and theological frameworks that evolved around these concepts in different centuries and different cultural contexts are extremely complex, often baroque. These frameworks may be Buddhist or they may be Christian; they may involve some sort of immortal self or not; there may be different concepts of God or none at all. Obviously, such theoretical systems have also emerged

from different forms of practice. But they all seem to be getting at something similar through their use of metaphors of ground and its opposites. We should not be blinded by the varying conceptual surface—but in trying to see the phenomenal reality below it, we must also avoid falling into extremes.

“Perennialism” is the philosophical thesis that a common core can be identified in all mystical experiences across all cultures and traditions, in all periods, and in many social and religious contexts.⁸⁰ I am not a perennialist. Also, MPE itself is not a mystical experience, because MPE states are not mystical states—though some MPE *modes* may actually fall under one or other technical definition of “mystical experience.” More interestingly, we can now ask the question of “MPE perennialism”: Is there an essential, shared phenomenal character that unites all human beings who undergo minimal phenomenal experience? MPE perennialism could be the philosophical thesis proposing that, across all cultures and traditions, there is one single kind of phenomenal character that, though mostly unattended, exists in all conscious human beings, and perhaps even in other animals, like the Buddha nature that exists in all sentient beings. I am not an MPE perennialist either, but I think an evidence-based, bottom-up approach may open a new middle way that most of us can live with.⁸¹

You may recall some of the seven Eastern concepts related to the experience of pure consciousness that I listed as opening examples in the introduction: *dharmakāya*, *rigpa*, *sākṣin*, *samādhi*, *sat-chit-ananda*, *turīya*, and *ye shes*. I am certainly not saying that all of them refer to exactly the same category of experience, or that they simply “are” MPE. In the same vein, I am not saying that Western concepts like *ataraxia* or *Seelengrund* are coextensional in the sense of actually having the same referent; they are definitely not like the two terms “Morning Star” and “Evening Star,” for example, which refer to the same physical object—namely, the planet Venus (a simple empirical fact that was unknown to humankind for many centuries). In humankind’s history of contemplative practice, *many* such intimately related concepts have been coined—but they certainly do not all refer to exactly the same state of consciousness.

We must get used to the possibility that there may be no such thing as “sameness” here.⁸² What would our criteria for identity be? Our search for a single conceptual essence may itself be a form of narrative self-deception, a craving for reification ultimately driven by our basic need for mortality denial (chapter 17). Perennialism is an emotionally attractive but empirically untestable ideology: How would one produce intersubjectively verifiable evidence for it?

To be sure, a certain kind of essentialism can be found in the ninety-two questions of our online survey and the statistical dimensions that emerge from them as our twelve factors: The software treats all identical answers to the same question as

identical, as single data points—what else would it do? But here is a thought experiment: What would happen if (as a hypothetical) all the participants and expert texts provided reports that sounded strictly identical? We would have discovered a strong pattern of commonality on the level of verbal *reports*, but we still wouldn't know whether the phenomenological *referents* were actually identical, whether all of these identical responses actually referred to one and the same kind of conscious experience. It could always be possible that people have slightly different experiences but later describe them in identical ways. No two brains are exactly alike. But what if, extending the hypothetical, participants showed identical patterns on all objective markers? What if, as spiritual naturalists, we concluded that it is not the physical brain itself, but some more abstract neurocomputational signature—a certain high-level pattern in the flow of information—that unequivocally determines MPE? Wouldn't this be a form of evidence for perennialism? This scenario is not far-fetched because we might certainly discover the neurocomputational signature of pure awareness in the course of this century. But to accept *this* signature as the sole criterion for sameness would itself be a philosophical move. It would need an independent philosophical argument.

Spiritually as well as scientifically, taking the pure-awareness experience seriously also means dissolving any form of intellectual contraction or metaphysical reification. From a theoretical perspective, there exists a complex history of ideas, and in a scholarly sense, there is not much that will remain simple and intuitive here. Empirically, a future computational neuroscience of MPE will hopefully develop formal criteria for simplicity and sameness across time, but these criteria may not satisfy the intuitions that we have about our own experience. Nonetheless, it does seem that *in some way*, “groundless ground” and *Seelengrund* are picking out something important, something historically long-lasting, something that is directly related to the pure-awareness experience, and perhaps even something that may be largely innate and ultimately shared among all sentient creatures. This intuition must be taken seriously because it results from the fact that all these theories and concepts have what I would like to call a “phenomenological anchor.”

A phenomenological anchor is not an essence. It is not a single and context-invariant experiential quality, a single intrinsic nature that can be extracted and easily described in folk-psychological terms.⁸³ Rather, an anchor is a region in phenomenal state space. For every embodied being, this region will be slightly different, and it will also change over each individual's lifetime. As I explained at the beginning of this book, the space of possible conscious experience has many dimensions and is characterized by a rich inner landscape. Yes, this landscape may always have a deepest point, and physically,

it is locally realized in the human brain. This brain, however, is not only embodied but also enculturated—and therefore the use and definition of terms like “pure consciousness” necessarily change over time as linguistic communities and their corresponding cognitive niches keep developing.

Nevertheless, the anchor for pure consciousness itself certainly exists; there is a *prototypical* region in the space of experience, a cluster of phenomenal properties that “hang together” with high probability. “Nondual being” and “groundless ground” are examples of such properties. MPE is the core of this prototypical region, and it anchors the way that we speak about our contemplative experiences—perhaps, unbeknownst to most of us, even the way that we speak about *all* our experiences. As David Higgins would put it, commonalities in testimonial accounts of pure awareness do suggest that certain modes of inquiry (as reflected in, and constituted by, our MPE reports) open commensurable modes of experiencing and articulation. What all the ideas and concepts mentioned in this discussion—*Seelengrund*, the groundless ground, or the seven Eastern examples from the introduction that I just relisted—have in common is that their semantics are causally rooted in a neglected but specific form of nonconceptual experience, a prototypical region of phenomenal state space. This experience was what came first, and all the elaborate conceptual systems—as well as all those poetic and paradoxical philosophical ideas like the “groundless ground of the soul”—are ultimately anchored by the phenomenal character of MPE.

What came first was the epistemic practice of silent meditation. Later, human beings tried to make sense of and convey their own experience on a conceptual level; they tried to describe MPE phenomenology to each other. In doing so, they created new words. Ambiguities arose, they had to be settled, and gradually the original project degenerated into theology and philosophical metaphysics, eventually leading to the kinds of philological nitpicking, dogmatism, and scholastic hair-splitting that are still with us today. This is how the problem of theory contamination arose and why a fresh bottom-up approach is needed. Now it is the phenomenology itself that really counts—and perhaps we even need a new generation of scholar-practitioners not blinded by ideology. “Phenomenology” is a very European project, but today, a genuinely transcultural approach is needed. Might a new form of computational phenomenology⁸⁴ provide us with much finer-grained conceptual instruments that help us transcend old limitations? The challenge is daunting, but somehow we must try to get as close as possible to the experience itself.

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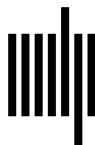
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