Topic: According to W.T.Stace in "The Teaching of the Mystics", a sceptical interpretation of mystical experience is that "mystical consciousness reveals no reality outside its owner's brain".
Does this sceptical view entail that mysticism is worthless delusion?

In this essay, we are going to try and analyse if the sceptical view of mysticism entails that mysticism is *worthless delusion*. To analyse the view we will focus on the following main concerns; Can experiences (of any sort) ever be *worthless*, Are mystical experiences worthless, Are mystical experiences delusions and how useful can delusions be anyway. We will attempt to show why mysticism is definitely not worthless, on the contrary, we will attempt to show why mystical experiences are *one of the most relevant/important* experience in a mystics life.

Can an experience be worthless?

We will need to examine the concept of 'something being worthless' before we can go on to ask if experiences are worthless. We tend to define things as worthless if we cannot use them in some way for our betterment; that is, we define the worth of things by how much utility they hold for us. Now, the basic characteristic all experiences have in common is the fact that they change the way we *look* at things. As can be seen, the utility of the experience lies in how much it changes us towards what we feel as better. We can easily deduce from the above that no experience is worthless, only that some experiences are better than others. Later we shall try to show why a *mystical experience* is one of the *most worthy* types of experience anyone can ever have.

Are mystical experiences worthless?

Among the special qualities of mystical experiences seem to be the ability to transcendent the limiting factors of conditioning, contradictions, rationality, duality and even understanding as we commonly conceive of it. When a person returns from the realms of the mystical experience, the 'visible' qualities that he brings 'back' with him include those of great love, compassion, joy and contentment. From the *social* point of view people will view his experience as very worthy because his qualities of love and compassion go a long way in promoting harmony within the society. From his more person point of view though, the experience will be anything but worthless, because he will have, to a great extent, seemingly achieved what we all (including him) are striving for, and that is bliss[N1]. One would have to have strange concepts of worthiness indeed if one is to call such experiences worthless.

Are mystical experiences delusions?

People claim that mystical experiences are experiences of an objective reality[N2]. However as stated in the question, it is assumed that "mystical consciousness reveals no reality outside its owner's brain", we are *forced* to assume that mystical experiences are delusions because they tend to show us an objective reality whereas they show us no reality outside the owners brain which means that the experiences are completely subjective. If we were to follow this trend, we would very soon get to solipsism which I think is in itself based on 'faith'; faith that what we believe of as the 'model of rationality and consciousness' is correct! However, as stated above, we will assume that mystical experiences are delusions *as required*.

How useful can delusions be?

Let us now be 'good sceptics' and extend out 'scepticism' to entail the experience of time. That is, let us assume that time does not exist apart from *our experience of it*. However in terms of utility, the experience of time is one of the most useful experiences we have. Our whole lives revolve around *our* experiences of time. We are forever trying to learn from the *past* so that we may anticipate and improve our *future*. We can see clearly that even if time does not exist apart from our experience of it, it cannot be said to be worthless. Similarly, mystical experiences have just as strong a foundation (as time in someone mind) and cannot be said to be worthless.

Similarly we can draw an analogy of material/physical substances. Let us take from example a person who believes that material/physical things do not exist. Let us also assume that once upon a time, this person was hit by a car and that caused him much pain. Now, of course, he will believe that it all just happened in his consciousness, including his experience of the *pain*. Yet if he were about to be hit by a car again he would probably jump out of the way, *not* because there exists something material/physical in reality called a car, but because he has the experience of something physical (be it only within his 'mind'), and he does not with to feel 'pain' again. Similarly, once again, we can see how a person who has had a mystical experience is likely to treat it as *real* and conduct his life accordingly.

As can be seen, even if we make the rash assumption that mystical experiences are delusions, we can still see that they are definitely not worthless. Empirical observation also tend to show great change in the lives of people who had mystical experiences, eg. Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Moses, Muhammad and various other sages of the past and present times.

Notes

[N1] On the very superficial level bliss might be interpreted as just happiness.

[N2] The mystic would probably not say that *mystical experiences* show us *objective realities*, they would rather say that the conditioning's of *objectivity* and *subjectivity* disappear to form a *unity*; however since this essay is based upon the readings by W.T.Stace, and since *he claims* that "We may believe that a mystic really is in touch, as he usually claims, with some being greater than himself, some spiritual Infinite which transcends the temporal flux of things."[B1], it tends to suggest that mystical experiences show us the existence of a reality *other* than ourselves, and hence we are forced to assume that mystical experience show us an objective reality for the purposes of this essay.

[B1] Klemke, E. D. To Believe or Not to Believe (Orlando, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p.80.