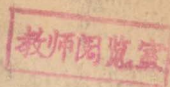


Modern Library

8090606



# The Varieties of Religious Experience William James



B712.4  
E 601

8090606

0655

# THE VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

---

*A Study in Human Nature*

---

Being the Gifford Lectures on  
Natural Religion Delivered at  
Edinburgh in 1901-1902

BY WILLIAM JAMES



THE MODERN LIBRARY  
New York



T8090606

FIRST MODERN LIBRARY EDITION, 1936

Copyright, 1902, by William James

Copyright renewed, 1929

All rights reserved under International and  
Pan-American Copyright Conventions.  
Published in the United States by Random House,  
Inc., New York. Distributed in Canada  
by Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto.

Manufactured in the United States of America

**THE  
VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS  
EXPERIENCE**

To  
E. P. G.  
IN FILIAL GRATITUDE AND LOVE

## PREFACE

THIS book would never have been written had I not been honored with an appointment as Gifford Lecturer on Natural Religion at the University of Edinburgh. In casting about me for subjects of the two courses of ten lectures each for which I thus became responsible, it seemed to me that the first course might well be a descriptive one on "Man's Religious Appetites," and the second a metaphysical one on "Their Satisfaction through Philosophy." But the unexpected growth of the psychological matter as I came to write it out has resulted in the second subject being postponed entirely, and the description of man's religious constitution now fills the twenty lectures. In Lecture XX I have suggested rather than stated my own philosophic conclusions, and the reader who desires immediately to know them should turn to pages 501-509, and to the "Postscript" of the book. I hope to be able at some later day to express them in more explicit form.

In my belief that a large acquaintance with particulars often makes us wiser than the possession of abstract formulas, however deep, I have loaded the lectures with concrete examples, and I have chosen these among the extremest expressions of the religious temperament. To some readers I may consequently seem, before they get beyond the middle of the book, to offer a caricature of the subject. Such convulsions of piety, they will say, are not sane. If, however, they will have the patience to read to the end, I believe that this unfavorable impression will dis-

appear; for I there combine the religious impulses with other principles of common sense which serve as correctives of exaggeration, and allow the individual reader to draw as moderate conclusions as he will.

My thanks for help in writing these lectures are due to Edwin D. Starbuck, of Stanford University, who made over to me his large collection of manuscript material; to Henry W. Rankin, of East Northfield, a friend unseen but proved, to whom I owe precious information; to Theodore Flournoy, of Geneva, to Canning Schiller of Oxford, and to my colleague Benjamin Rand, for documents; to my colleague Dickinson S. Miller, and to my friends, Thomas Wren Ward, of New York, and Wincenty Lutoslawski, late of Cracow, for important suggestions and advice. Finally, to conversations with the lamented Thomas Davidson and to the use of his books, at Glenmore, above Keene Valley, I owe more obligations than I can well express.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY,  
March, 1902.

## WILLIAM JAMES

(1842-1910)

### A NOTE ON THE AUTHOR OF "THE VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE"

The road by which William James arrived at his position of leadership among American philosophers was, during his childhood, youth and early maturity, quite as circuitous and unpredictable as were his father's ideas on the training of his children. That Swedenborgian theologian foresaw neither the career of novelist for his son Henry, nor that of pragmatist philosopher for the older William. The father's migrations between New York, Europe and Newport meant that William's education had variety if it did not have fixed direction. From 13 to 18 he studied in Europe and returned to Newport, Rhode Island, to study painting under the guidance of John La Farge. After a year, he gave up art for science and entered Harvard University, where his most influential teachers were Louis Agassiz and Charles W. Eliot. In 1863, William James began the study of medicine, and in 1865 he joined an expedition to the Amazon. Before long, he wrote: "If there is anything I hate, it is collecting." His studies constantly interrupted by ill health, James returned to Germany and began hearing lectures and reading voluminously in philosophy. He won his medical degree at Harvard in 1870. For four years he was an invalid in Cambridge, but finally, in 1873, he passed his gravest physical and spiritual crises and began the career by which he was to influence so profoundly generations of American students. From 1880 to 1907 he was successively assistant professor of philosophy, professor of psychology and professor of philosophy at Harvard. In 1890, the publication of his *Principles of Psychology* brought him the acknowledged leadership in the field of functional psychology. The selection of William James to deliver the Gifford lectures in Edinburgh was at once a tribute to him and a reward for the university that sponsored the undertaking. These lectures, collected in this volume, have since become famous as the standard scientific work on the psychology of the religious impulse. Death ended his career on August 27th, 1910.



# CONTENTS

## LECTURE I

PAGE

### RELIGION AND NEUROLOGY

3

Introduction: the course is not anthropological, but deals with personal documents—Questions of fact and questions of value—In point of fact, the religious are often neurotic—Criticism of medical materialism, which condemns religion on that account—Theory that religion has a sexual origin refuted—All states of mind are neurally conditioned—Their significance must be tested not by their origin but by the value of their fruits—Three criteria of value; origin useless as a criterion—Advantages of the psychopathic temperament when a superior intellect goes with it—especially for the religious life.

## LECTURE II

### CIRCUMSCRIPTION OF THE TOPIC

27

Futility of simple definitions of religion—No one specific “religious sentiment”—Institutional and personal religion—We confine ourselves to the personal branch—Definition of religion for the purpose of these lectures—Meaning of the term “divine”—The divine is what prompts *solemn* reactions—Impossible to make our definitions sharp—We must study the more extreme cases—Two ways of accepting the universe—Religion is more enthusiastic than philosophy—Its characteristic is enthusiasm in solemn emotion—Its ability to overcome unhappiness—Need of such a faculty from the biological point of view.

## LECTURE III

## THE REALITY OF THE UNSEEN . . . . . 53

Percepts *versus* abstract concepts—Influence of the latter on belief—Kant's theological Ideas—We have a sense of reality other than that given by the special senses—Examples of "sense of presence"—The feeling of unreality—Sense of a divine presence: examples—Mystical experiences: examples—Other cases of sense of God's presence—Convincingness of unreasoned experience—Inferiority of rationalism in establishing belief—Either enthusiasm or solemnity may preponderate in the religious attitude of individuals.

## LECTURES IV AND V

## THE RELIGION OF HEALTHY-MINDEDNESS . . . . . 77

Happiness is man's chief concern—"Once-born" and "twice-born" characters—Walt Whitman—Mixed nature of Greek feeling—Systematic healthy-mindedness—Its reasonableness—Liberal Christianity shows it—Optimism as encouraged by Popular Science—The "Mind-cure" movement—Its creed—Cases—Its doctrine of evil—Its analogy to Lutheran theology—Salvation by relaxation—Its methods: suggestion—meditation—"recollection"—verification—Diversity of possible schemes of adaptation to the universe—APPENDIX: Two mind-cure cases.

## LECTURES VI AND VII

## THE SICK SOUL . . . . . 125

Healthy-mindedness and repentance—Essential pluralism of the healthy-minded philosophy—Morbid-mindedness: its two degrees—The pain-threshold varies in individuals—Insecurity of natural goods—Failure, or vain

success of every life—Pessimism of all pure naturalism—Hopelessness of Greek and Roman view—Pathological unhappiness — “Anhedonia” — Querulous melancholy—Vital zest is a pure gift—Loss of it makes physical world look different—Tolstoy—Bunyan—Alline—Morbid fear—Such cases need a supernatural religion for relief—Antagonism of healthy-mindedness and morbidness—The problem of evil cannot be escaped.

# LECTURE VIII

## THE DIVIDED SELF, AND THE PROCESS OF ITS UNIFICATION

163

Heterogeneous personality—Character gradually attains unity—Examples of divided self—The unity attained need not be religious—“Counter conversion” cases—Other cases—Gradual and sudden unification—Tolstoy’s recovery—Bunyan’s.

# LECTURE IX

## CONVERSION

186

Case of Stephen Bradley—The psychology of character-changes—Emotional excitements make new centres of personal energy—Schematic ways of representing this—Starbuck likens conversion to normal moral ripening—Leuba’s ideas—Seemingly unconvertible persons—Two types of conversion—Subconscious incubation of motives—Self-surrender—Its importance in religious history—Cases.

# LECTURE X

## CONVERSION—*concluded*

213

Cases of sudden conversion—Is suddenness essential?—No, it depends on psychological idiosyncrasy—Proved

existence of transmarginal, or subliminal, consciousness—"Automatisms"—Instantaneous conversions seem due to the possession of an active subconscious self by the subject—The value of conversion depends not on the process, but on the fruits—These are not superior in sudden conversion—Professor Coe's views—Sanctification as a result—Our psychological account does not exclude direct presence of the Deity—Sense of higher control—Relations of the emotional "faith-state" to intellectual beliefs—Leuba quoted—Characteristics of the faith-state: sense of truth; the world appears new—Sensory and motor automatisms—Permanency of conversions.

#### LECTURES XI, XII, AND XIII

##### SAINTLINESS

254

Sainte-Beuve on the State of Grace—Types of character as due to the balance of impulses and inhibitions—Sovereign excitements—Irrascibility—Effects of higher excitement in general—The saintly life is ruled by spiritual excitement—This may annul sensual impulses permanently—Probable subconscious influences involved—Mechanical scheme for representing permanent alteration in character—Characteristics of saintliness—Sense of reality of a higher power—Peace of mind, charity—Equanimity, fortitude, etc.—Connection of this with relaxation—Purity of life—Asceticism—Obedience—Poverty—The sentiments of democracy and of humanity—General effects of higher excitements.

#### LECTURES XIV AND XV

##### THE VALUE OF SAINTLINESS

320

It must be tested by the human value of its fruits—

The reality of the God must, however, also be judged—"Unfit" religions get eliminated by "experience"—Empiricism is not skepticism—Individual and tribal religion—Loneliness of religious originators—Corruption follows success—Extravagances—Excessive devoutness, as fanaticism—As theopathic absorption—Excessive purity—Excessive charity—The perfect man is adapted only to the perfect environment—Saints are leavens—Excesses of asceticism—Asceticism symbolically stands for the heroic life—Militarism and voluntary poverty as possible equivalents—*Pros* and *cons* of the saintly character—Saints *versus* "strong" men—Their social function must be considered—Abstractly the saint is the highest type, but in the present environment it may fail, so we make ourselves saints at our peril—The question of theological truth.

## LECTURES XVI AND XVII

### MYSTICISM

370

Mysticism defined—Four marks of mystic states—They form a distinct region of consciousness—Examples of their lower grades—Mysticism and alcohol—"The anæsthetic revelation"—Religious mysticism—Aspects of Nature—Consciousness of God—"Cosmic consciousness"—Yoga—Buddhistic mysticism—Sufism—Christian mystics—Their sense of revelation—Tonic effects of mystic states—They describe by negatives—Sense of union with the Absolute—Mysticism and music—Three conclusions—(1) Mystical states carry authority for him who has them—(2) But for no one else—(3) Nevertheless, they break down the exclusive authority of rationalistic states—They strengthen monistic and optimistic hypotheses.

## LECTURE XVIII

## PHILOSOPHY

421

Primacy of feeling in religion, philosophy being a secondary function—Intellectualism professes to escape subjective standards in her theological constructions—"Dogmatic theology"—Criticism of its account of God's attributes—"Pragmatism" as a test of the value of conceptions—God's metaphysical attributes have no practical significance—His moral attributes are proved by bad arguments; collapse of systematic theology—Does transcendental idealism fare better? Its principles—Quotations from John Caird—They are good as restatements of religious experience, but uncoercive as reasoned proof—What philosophy *can* do for religion by transforming herself into "science of religions."

## LECTURE XIX

## OTHER CHARACTERISTICS

448

Æsthetic elements in religion—Contrast of Catholicism and Protestantism—Sacrifice and Confession—Prayer—Religion holds that spiritual work is really effected in prayer—Three degrees of opinion as to what is effected—First degree—Second degree—Third degree—Automatisms, their frequency among religious leaders—Jewish cases—Mohammed—Joseph Smith—Religion and the subconscious region in general.

## LECTURE XX

## CONCLUSIONS

475

Summary of religious characteristics—Men's religions need not be identical—"The science of religions" can only suggest, not proclaim, a religious creed—Is religion

# CONTENTS

xiii

PAGE

a "survival" of primitive thought?—Modern science rules out the concept of personality—Anthropomorphism and belief in the personal characterized pre-scientific thought—Personal forces are real, in spite of this—Scientific objects are abstractions, only individualized experiences are concrete—Religion holds by the concrete—Primarily religion is a biological reaction—Its simplest terms are an uneasiness and a deliverance; description of the deliverance—Question of the reality of the higher power—The author's hypotheses: 1. The subconscious self as intermediating between nature and the higher region—2. The higher region, or "God"—3. He produces real effects in nature.

## POSTSCRIPT

510

Philosophic position of the present work defined as piecemeal supernaturalism—Criticism of universalistic supernaturalism—Different principles must occasion differences in fact—What differences in fact can God's existence occasion?—The question of immortality—Question of God's uniqueness and infinity: religious experience does not settle this question in the affirmative—The pluralistic hypothesis is more conformed to common sense.

## INDEX

519

THE VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS  
EXPERIENCE



