

WILLIAM JAMES ON RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE, SCIENCE OF RELIGIONS, AND MYSTICISM

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ABSTRACT

Religious experience has been one of the focuses of discussion of critical thinking especially since the nineteenth century. Here two fundamental distinctions can be made methodologically: the study of religious experience on the horizon where it intersects with the institutional side of religion or with personal experience. William James provides a distinctively constitutive example of the second method presented in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Treating religious experience in its personal dimensions highlights a unique aspect of it: mysticism. While approaching religious experience at the border of personal experience his work, James engages in a serious analysis of documents. Although he is one of the founding fathers of psychology, what James does here is not just basically a psychology of religion. Based on the analysis of this vast repertoire of documents, James tries to reveal a science of religions. In this context, in the present study, James' approach to religious experience will be examined. Although the study is methodologically descriptive, the aim of this attitude is to indicate the actuality of James's work.

Keywords: Religious experience, mysticism, science of religions, moral life

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Introduction

All the major religions, though, center on a definite conception of tolerance, religious fundamentalism is a significant problem in the contemporary politics all around the world. We face it even in certain countries which are considered far off from this threat for the last few decades. In 2011 the deplorable terror attack in Norway is a peculiar example that points out the gravity of the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism even in the middle of the ideologically purified western discourse itself: In Norway on 22 July 2011, a Christian fundamentalist attacked a summer camp and set a bomb in a public space killed 77 people. It is considered Norwegian 9/11. The assailant considers his act *legitimate* as he shows no sign of regret. On the one hand, it showed the hypocrisy of the chauvinist discourse that holds Islam is the only fundamentalist religious threat. Islamophobia recently reveals itself through different and divergent actions in the Europe where religious tolerance discourse seemingly highly estimated. Provocative actions of burning Quran, regarded within the realm of freedom of speech and action without taking into the offended believers of Islam. On the other, it brought institutional aspects of religious life, which is essentially one of the significant causes for the political unrest, to the fore.

Nevertheless, the actuality of the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism blurs the dividing line between the institutional and personal aspects of religion. William James, through his pioneering work *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902), provides us an insightful and comprehensive approach towards the religious experience. Though there is certain contention regarding James' not dealing with the issue in terms of psychology for which he is the one of the founding fathers. Instead of analyzing the subject under the heading of psychology of religion, James takes on the issue through an unusual reference to an ambiguous search for science of religions. The phenomenon of religion permeates through in James's personal life particularly and his academic life in general. Thus, I here first concentrate on James's conception of religious experience in its personal aspect along with its extreme form, namely, mysticism, and then endeavor to focus on his genuine search for the possibility of a science of religions. In this context, I will make use of some of his earlier and later works, which cast light on the issue at hand, such as "The Will to Believe" (1896), "Does Consciousness Exist?" (1904), and *Pragmatism* (1907). Regarding the different periods within the thought of James religion is a continuous concern which traverses his corpus in depth. Radical empiricism is a late product of his philosophy. He thus claims that there is no logical connection between two of them. The rejection of the latter and holding only the pragmatist position does not result in contradiction.

James's unconventional and challenging work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which was published in 1902, consists of twenty lectures delivered at the University of Edinburgh in 1901-1902 as a part of Gifford Lecture series on Natural Religion. After its publication, the work had an immediate success and it has still a great influence on those who are interested in the phenomenon of religious experience, either scholarly or unscholarly. I aim at presenting essential aspects of James's unconventional and challenging approach towards phenomenon of religious experience and the possibility of a science of religions, which he endeavored to find a theoretical ground to his meticulous descriptive analysis of a great deal of personal biographies.

What philosophy is: Characteristic divisions of the mind

Before proceeding what philosophy can talk about the phenomenon of religious experience, one need to resort to what philosophy is for James. In his later work, *Pragmatism*, James defines philosophy as "our individual way of just seeing and feeling the total push and pressure of the cosmos" (2003: 1-2). For him, a human being, as an individual, has no fixed nature from which everything else about her might be derived, i.e., animal rationale. At the same time, universe is not a closed circle, either. James states, "The actual universe is a thing wide open" and he maintains that it is in process and cannot be defined by means of eternal completeness and perfection (2003: 13). These distinct definitions of philosophy and universe challenge two fundamental philosophical temperaments, namely, rationalism and empiricism *or* the tender-mindedness and tough-mindedness. We need to ask where James's pragmatism stands in this distinction regarding its challenge against these two mutually exclusive ways of thought, which has determined the course of philosophy for ages. James seeks to develop a reconciliatory position. Nevertheless, it is not a basic syncretism, but a peculiar synthesis. His conciliatory stand is compatible with his definition of pragmatism, which centers on the significance of practical consequences on human life. He writes, "What difference would it practically make to anyone if this notion rather than that notion were true?" (2003: 20). In the absence of such a criterion, it is groundless to talk about truth and falsity. It is this criterion of practical difference from

which the pragmatic conception of truth springs. James states, "True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we can no." (2003: 88). It is this pragmatic answer that indicates truth's "cash-value."

In comparison with the *Varieties of Religious Experience*, the classification of human beings' attitudes toward universe under the tender and tough mindedness is treated in a comprehensive context in his *Pragmatism*. In the former work, this distinction refers to two distinct religious characters, namely, religious optimism and pessimism. However, in the later, it is elucidated by extending the scope of this distinction to rationalism-empiricism opposition. James states, "We shall find it extraordinarily convenient to express a certain contrast in men's ways of taking their universe, by talking of the 'empiricist' and of the 'rationalist' temper. These terms make the contrast simple and massive" (2003: 4). Let us then go through his classification of the characteristics of the tender and tough-minded mentalities as it is presented in *Pragmatism*:

The Tender-Minded: Rationalistic, "Going by "principles"; Intellectualistic; Idealistic; Optimistic; Religious; Free-willist; Monistic; Dogmatical.

The Tough-Minded: Empiricist, Going by "facts"; Sensationalistic; Materialistic; Pessimistic; Irreligious; Fatalistic; Pluralistic; Skeptical (2003: 6).

This uncompromising distinction between rationalism and empiricism, for James, is historically synonymous with the distinction between intellectualism and sensationalism. Nevertheless, James endeavors to adopt a reconciliatory position beyond this two distinguished, but still respectively one-dimensional mental make-ups. He puts forth a "pluralistic monism" and "free will determinism." He states, "The world is indubitably one if you look at it in one way, but as indubitably is it many, if you look at it in another. It is both one and many –let us adopt a pluralistic monism." James maintains that "Everything of course is necessarily determined, and yet of course our wills are free: a sort of free will determinism is the true philosophy" (2003: 6). The fact of the presence of evil in the world is undeniable, but it is erroneous to characterize the whole world in terms of evil. Therefore, there emerges the question of the conciliation of the feeling of "insecurity." Is salvation possible or not? Is there a third alternative, a midway between optimism and pessimism? James's reply to all these questions is affirmative and forms the scope of his advocacy of the doctrine of "meliorism." He writes,

Meliorism treats salvation as neither necessary nor impossible. It treats it as a possibility, which becomes more and more of a probability the more numerous the actual conditions of salvation become (2003: 127).

For James, pragmatism is to be called religious insofar as it adopts the doctrine of meliorism. Then, for him, pragmatism finds its genuine expression in a pluralist monism and free will determinism.

Religious experience: Individual vs. institutional

After these preliminary remarks, let us turn back to *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, through which we are provided a genuine manifestation of James's endeavor to reconcile fact-value dichotomy. In this work, James's distinguished approach reveals itself in keeping in touch with the rich repertoire of facts without omitting the basic task of philosophy, that is, to acquire certain principles, universal validity. James professes that *The Varieties of Religious Experience* centers on a "descriptive" analysis of human beings' religious propensities. James, then, notes that his approach toward the issue is essentially determined by psychology. Therefore, it is quite important to grasp that *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is not a book on theology, history *or* anthropology of religion.

It is then the task of the first two lectures to set limits on the subject matter to determine its genuine scope. Instead of appealing to "abstract formulas," James concentrates on "concrete examples" in their extremest expressions (2004: 5). A close touch with the vast repertoire of concrete examples, James states, is a leading clue for a proper knowledge on any subject-matter. James's insistent emphasis on a descriptive analysis of human beings' religious tendencies in terms of psychology is of great importance. It casts light on his project for the rest of the lectures, namely, personal religion rather than institutional aspects of religion.

James states, "If the inquiry be psychological, not religious institutions, but rather religious feelings and religious impulses must be its subject" (2004: 16). In doing so, James holds, we are more likely to get hold of the "essence" of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, to capture the essence of human beings' religious tendencies is, for James, in no way equated to an inquiry of the origins. He holds, "an explanation of the origin of something does not give us simultaneously its significance" (2004: 21). Therefore, to ask "what are the religious propensities [of human beings]?" is completely different question than "what is their significance" (2004: 17). These two different questions correspond to two essentially different orders of

inquiry. The one centers on the existential facts, while the other deals with values. The respond for the first question is provided by an “existential judgment,” while the other is given in a “spiritual judgment,” or a “proposition of value.” Then, a historical analysis of religion is not sufficient in grasping the significance or value of religion. This is what James calls medical materialism. Medical materialism, James holds, falls short of consistency, because it neglects the spiritual judgment *or*, in other words, the proposition of value.

Medical materialism

James’s criticism of medical materialism needs to be clarified. James’s focus on the extreme examples is derived from his attempt to distinguish immediate religious experience from the second-hand religious life. As far as “ordinary believer” is concerned, James states, “his religion has been made for him by others, communicated to him by tradition, determined to fixed forms by imitation, and retained by habit” (2004: 19). In contrast to the ordinary believer, “religious geniuses,” James maintains, allows us to determine how religious life makes a person “exceptional” and “eccentric.” In addition, religious geniuses show certain symptoms, such as:

- Nervous instability,
- A discordant life,
- Melancholy,
- Frequently fallen into trances, heard voices, seen visions (2004: 19).

All these mental deviations, pathological features, for James, make the understanding of the significance of religious experience more efficient. Medical materialism’s fallacy depends on its ignorance on the value judgments. Medical materialism’s explanation of these mental deviations by means of organic causation is, for James, uninformative, inadequate, and insufficient. James states,

It [medical materialism] snuffs out St. Teresa as a hysteric, St. Francis of Assisi as a hereditary degenerate, George Fox’s discontent with the shams of his age, and his pinning for spiritual veracity, it treats as a symptom of disordered colon (2004: 24).

James acknowledges that there are some states of mind, which are superior to others, but the superiority is not depends on their origins. Then, James gives us a twofold criterion to the validity of religious experience: 1) “it is [superior] either because we take an immediate delight in them;” 2) “or else it is [superior] because we believe them to bring us good consequential fruits for life” (2004: 26). In addition, James offers a new set of criteria to judge the value of religious opinions:

- Immediate luminousness
- Philosophical reasonableness
- Moral helpfulness (2004: 28).

The distinctions between existential and value judgments and ordinary believer and religious geniuses are of great significance on determining the framework of the inquiry on the religious experience. Nevertheless, for James, one more step needs to be taken, namely, a definition of religion. James notes that there has been a controversy among scholars regarding the essence of religion. Religion, for James, cannot be grasped by means of “a single principle,” because it is a “collective name,” which consists of many “equally important” characters (2004: 35). What about religious sentiment? Can it be defined in terms of a single mental entity that gives us the essence of religion? James holds that the disagreement among scholars about what this entity could be indicates its invalidity. There have been offered certain candidates for the explanation of this single entity, such as

- The feeling of dependence
- A derivative from fear
- Sexual life
- The feeling of the infinite (2004: 36).

None of these candidates hold good, because religious feelings are no different than feelings in general, except being a feeling “directed to a religious object” (2004: 36).

Religion: The immediate personal experiences

Then, what is it to be understood by the term religion? James holds, “Religion, therefore, as I ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (2004, p. 39). This “arbitrarily” chosen definition leaves out the institutional aspects of religion and centers on “the immediate personal experiences” (2004: 39). In contrast to the institutional religion, which “defines religion as an external art,” personal religion, for James, is essentially grounded in “inner dispositions of man himself”

(2004: 37). Personal religion is more fundamental because it indicates “direct personal communion with the divine” (2004: 39). The divine,” for James, means “a primal reality as the individual impelled to respond to solemnly and gravely, and neither by a curse nor a jest” (2004: 45).

What is this primal, godlike, reality? Can it be known? If it can, then, how is it possible? James, before proceeding to deal with the arguments for the existence of god, calls attention to the primacy of the phenomenon of the reality of unseen. He holds, “One might say that it [the life of religion] consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto” (2004: 57). This so-called unseen reality resists to be conceptualized since it is not subject to our sense perception. On the other hand, it has “a definite meaning for our practice” (James, 2004: 58). James maintains,

All our attitudes, moral, practical, emotional, as well as religious, are due to the ‘objects’ of our consciousness, the things which we believe to exist, whether really or ideally, along with ourselves. Such objects may be present to our senses, or they may be present only to our thought. In either case they elicit from us a reaction; and the reaction due to things of thought is notoriously in many cases as strong as that due to sensible presences (2004: 57).

Human beings’ mental life cannot be grasped in its totality in terms of rationalism’s abstract formulas. There is always something that escapes from its conceptual boundaries. In the field of religion, for James, the non-rational and subconsciousness play a significant role. The feeling of “something there” is one of the basic characteristics of mystical experience. To James, what is important here is not the origin of this feeling, but its results, or its significance for human life. James holds, an immediate personal communion with what one calls divine contains certain characteristics which “morality pure and simple does not contain” (2004: 46). And mysticism is of that distinguished quality, since “personal religious experience has its roots and centre in mystical states of consciousness” (2004: 328).

Mystical experience

Mystical experience points out to a very vague field, and it is equivocal with respect to its meaning. It cannot be determined by appealing to facts or logic. Nevertheless, James promises the reader to be “as objective and receptive as” he can, first, regarding the reality of the [mystical] states [of consciousness] and secondly their “paramount importance of their function” (2004: 329). James divides the essential characteristics of mystical experience into four categories: 1) ineffability, 2) noetic quality, 3) transiency, and 4) passivity (2004: 329). These four characteristics of the mystical states of consciousness are also called “the mystical group” by James.

A mystical experience is ineffable because it escapes expression. James states, “no adequate report of its content can be given in words,” and he maintains, “its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others” (2004: 329). Therefore, this peculiar characteristic of mystical states of consciousness is not similar to states of intellect, but to states of feeling. Despite mystical states are analogous to states of feeling, James holds, “they seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge” (2004: 329). This peculiar characteristic indicates the noetic quality of the mystical experience. Mystical states are transient because they do not last long. Finally, during this transient experience, the will of the mystic is held in abeyance and, James maintains, “as if he were grasped and held by a superior power” (2004: 330). One must note that these four characteristics of mystical states of consciousness are not solely limited to religious mysticism, but they embrace the mystical states at large.

The Varieties of Religious Experience is not only an exploration and exposition of the phenomenon of religious experience, but it is also an inquiry into the depths of human nature. What is of importance here is in the understanding of the experience of mysticism; we encounter a fundamental challenge to the traditional understanding of human nature in terms of rationality, as if it were a distinguished privilege of her. Rationality is a part and parcel of human nature, but human consciousness consists of some other aspects whose negligence makes a complete account of both human nature and the universe impossible. However, James avoids making a value judgment regarding inferiority-superiority between the rational and non-rational aspects of consciousness.

To James, ineffability and noetic quality are of more distinctive quality in the understanding of the mystical states of consciousness. These states essentially indicates that there are certain aspects of consciousness which defies to be subsumed under rationality, but still has to do with knowledge and has significance on human life. James in “Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist?” refines his dissatisfaction with the conventional understanding of consciousness. He argues against the assumption of the substantiality of consciousness. For him, consciousness is nothing but a “function,” and this function is, James states, knowing

(1967a:170).

Mystical states of consciousness essentially immersed in subjectivity, namely, feelings, rather than intellect. James states, "Mystical truth exists for the individual who has the transport, but for no one else. In this, as I have said, it resembles the knowledge given to us in sensations more than that given by conceptions" (2004: 351). In this respect, there arise certain questions: What kind of knowledge emerges from the mystical states of consciousness? How it is to be understood? How it is possible that the question of their authority to be resolved?

Before proceeding the question of authority, we need to take the achievement of mysticism into consideration. James holds, in passing a "spiritual judgment" upon the mystical states of consciousness, one needs to appeal to "their fruits for life," rather than focusing on their origins. The epistemological quality of mystical experiences has no resemblance to conceptual knowledge but has essentially to do with sensations. For James, the epistemological quality is determined by the fundamental characteristic of the mystical experience, namely, "face to face presentations of what seems immediately exist" (2004: 367). James offers us to grapple with the meaning of religious experience in general and mystical states of consciousness in particular by appealing to their practical consequences, namely, their fruits for life. Then, one needs to ask what the use of this sort of knowledge is. Philosophically, it dismantles the traditional understanding of the fundamental characteristic of human beings. Being a rational creature is a privilege, but this privilege falls short of explaining a human being as a whole, in her relation to others and to the universe. There are other aspects of human consciousness which cannot be understood by conceptual knowledge. Practically, mystical states of consciousness eliminate all hindrances between the individual and the absolute. James states, "In mystics states we both become one with the absolute and we become aware of our oneness" (2004: 362-363). James resorts to Dr. R. M. Bucke, a Canadian psychiatrist, in dealing with the consequences of the mystical states upon human life. Bucke's definition of "cosmic consciousness" has significant influence on James. For Bucke, cosmic consciousness is "not simply an expansion or extension of the self-conscious mind with which we are all familiar, but the superaddition of a function as distinct from any possessed by the average man as *self-consciousness* is distinct from any function, possessed by one of the higher animals" (2004: 344). Bucke maintains that:

The prime characteristic of cosmic consciousness is a consciousness of the cosmos, that is, of the life and order of the universe. Along with the consciousness of the cosmos there occurs an intellectual enlightenment which alone would place the individual on a new plane of existence –would make him almost a member of a new species. To this is added a state of moral exaltation, an indescribable feeling of elevation, elation, and joyousness, and a quickening of the moral sense, which is fully as striking, and more important than is the enhanced intellectual power. With these come what may be called a sense of immortality, a consciousness of eternal life, not a conviction that he shall have this, but the consciousness that he has it already (James, 2004: 344-345).

Authoritativeness of mystical experience

After having briefly sketched the significance of the mystical states upon human life, we can now turn back to the question of authoritativeness of the mystical states. James's respond to this question consists of three essential remarks. First, mystical states indicate immediate sensational experience and cannot be explained through the framework of rational logic. Mystical states, James holds, "are usually authoritative over those who experience them" (2004: 366). Secondly, this personal experience is 'suggestive' for outsiders not for "logical reasons," but for their practical consequences upon life (2004: 367). Finally, mystical states challenge the assumption that claims non-mystical states of consciousness as fundamental. Mystical states bring new horizon before the individual. James states, "As a rule, mystical states add a supersensuous meaning to the ordinary outward data of consciousness" (2006: 369). What mystical states provide to us makes sense when we resort to James's claim about the supremacy of certain states of mind. Mystical states, James states, "tell of the supremacy of the ideal, of vastness, of union, of safety, and of rest" and he maintains, "They offer us *hypotheses*, hypotheses which we may voluntarily ignore, but which as thinkers we cannot possibly upset" (2004: 370).

Then, we need to ask what a hypothesis is and how it is useful in the understanding of religious faith. James's "The Will to Believe" seeks an answer to the question of the justification of faith. This essay, for James, is a "defense of our right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters" (1967b: 717). How is it possible to justify or defend religious faith in the lack of scientific evidence or beyond discursive intellect's exclusive logical framework? A hypothesis, for James, is "anything that may be proposed to our belief"

(1967b: 717). A hypothesis, for James, can be living or dead, forced or avoidable, and momentous or trivial. Deciding between two hypotheses provide us an option, but the genuineness of an option is relative to the particular point of view of a believer, not substantial. As to James, a genuine option consists of living (a real possibility to whom it is proposed), forced (no possibility of not choosing), and momentous (a unique opportunity) hypotheses.

It is obvious that feeling, as the ultimate source of religion, cannot provide us a universal validity. It is due to the fundamental characteristic of feeling, namely, its privacy or inability to provide an explanation of itself. It is the business of philosophy to search for a universal ground for truth. In her search for universal validity, philosophy has been sacrificed the individuality and subjectivity for the sake of an impersonal truth. For James, the main problem for a science of religions is to find out a way beyond general and abstract formulas. Leaving aside the intellectualism in religions requires a new path which cannot be explored by means of logical reason or non-subjective facts. The question of veracity cannot be fulfilled in terms of pre-established intellectual categories or creating a "metaphysical monster" through verbosity, which levels out the vitality of religious life. The arguments for the existence of God are useless, because, for James, the real question is not the existence of God or his attributes but the significance of religion upon human life. He states, "Does God exist? How does he exist? What is he? are so many irrelevant questions. Not God, but life, moral life, a larger, richer, more satisfying life, is, in the last analysis, the end of religion" (2004: 435). On the other hand, it must be noted that James makes a distinction between the metaphysical and moral attributes of God. From a pragmatic point of view, the former has no significance, but the latter is very connected to human life and conduct. For James, it the success of the continental schools of philosophy, especially British and Scotch, to underscore the importance of the connection between thinking and acting. Abstract philosophical propositions do not make any sense if there is no practical difference. James holds, "Conceptual process can class facts, define them, interpret them; but they do not produce them, nor can they reproduce their individuality. There is always a *plus*, a *thisness*, which feeling alone can answer for. Philosophy in this sphere is thus a secondary function, unable to warrant faith's veracity..." (2004: 392). How does, then, philosophy help us out in attaining universality or objective validity in the realm of religion which is deeply immersed in subjectivity? James's reply to this question is given by setting a new task to philosophy, abandoning "metaphysics and deduction for criticism and induction," and transforming herself "from theology into science of religions" (2004: 392). James maintains that,

The spontaneous intellect of man always defines the divine which it feels in ways that harmonize with its temporary intellectual prepossessions. Philosophy can by comparison eliminate the local and the accidental from these definitions. Both from dogma and from worship she can remove historic incrustations. By confronting the spontaneous religious constructions with the results of natural science, philosophy can also eliminate doctrines that are now known to be scientifically absurd or incongruous. Sifting out in this way unworthy formulations, she can leave a residuum of conceptions that at least are possible (2004: 392-3).

In doing so, philosophy, as a mediator between different believers, gives way to 'consensus of opinions.' The science of religion is essentially rooted in concrete life, yet "its formulas are but approximations" (2004: 393). James holds that prayer, like sacrifice and confession, is described as the most fundamental features of religion in books on religion. He asserts that prayer is, in a wide sense, "the very soul and essence of religion" (2004: 400). It functions as a moral healer. Moreover, in a prayerful life we find "the persuasion that in the process of communion energy from on high flows in to meet demand, and becomes operative within the phenomenal world. So long as this operativeness is admitted to be real, it makes no essential difference whether its immediate effects be subjective or objective" (2004: 411). It represents the intercourse between the individual and higher powers. It is not a one-sided relation, but active and mutual, namely, it is a give and take relationship. What is more to the point, this transaction, James holds, is of certain effects within the phenomenal world.

Conclusion: Personal relation or communion with the higher powers

Is it, then, possible to take away this genuine personal relation or communion with the higher powers? Is it the sole task of philosophy or science to ground their account of religion in terms of non-anthropomorphic nomenclature? This is the claim of the survival theory. Nevertheless, for James, "the world of experience consists at all times of two parts, an objective and a subjective part, of which the former may be incalculably more extensive than the latter; and yet the latte can never be omitted or suppressed" (2004: 428). It is this larger aspect of human nature that needs to be taken seriously into consideration in the understanding of the phenomenon of religious experience. The descriptive method, which James adopts, provides us a meticulous

presentation of both religious experience and human nature in their extremities. This detailed exploration makes it possible to pass value judgments. The science of religions points out that there are some aspects of religious life, which are practically similar in all faiths whether it be practice or feeling. James asks two distinguished questions in order to go beyond subjective aspects and grapples with the intellectual content itself. These two questions are as follows:

1. Is there, under all the discrepancies of the creeds, a common nucleus to which they bear their testimony unanimously?
2. Ought we to consider the testimony true? (2004: 435).

James's answers to those questions are affirmative. He holds, "The warring of gods and formulas of the various religions do indeed cancel each other, but there is a certain uniform deliverance in which religions all appear to meet" and James maintains that "it consists of two parts: - 1. An uneasiness; and 2. Its solution" (2004: 435). Uneasiness indicates that "there is *something wrong about us* as we naturally stand" (2004: 435). It can be called as stage one, *or* suffering. As to solution, James holds, it "is a sense that we *are saved from the wrongness* by making proper connection with the higher powers" (2004: 435). This stage can be called salvation *or* solution. Nevertheless, it must be noted that a science of religions is not the same thing as living religion.

James holds, "Knowledge about life is one thing; effective occupation of a place in life, with its dynamic currents passing through your being, is another" (2004: 421). An impartial science of religion is possible in terms of finding out a common nucleus among the discrepancies which are given us through a meticulous descriptive analysis. We now know that this peculiar search for a distinct science of religions not yet reached, but this seeming failure does not preclude us to acknowledge its essential claims anyway. Instead of reducing the originality of religious experience only to the psychological objectification which grasps its object solely from without, James paved the way to grapple with the issue at hand even sometimes taking the risk of trespassing the limits between the experience of object and experience itself. This so-called transgression makes it possible to grasp the meaning of the religious experience in its original complexity.

Hart holds that William James is a "pattern-setter" for other in the establishment of the study of the psychology of religion" (2008: 517). Spohn claims that James coined the term of religious experience, and his *Varieties* is the landmark in the study of the psychology of religion. Spohn also underscores that the *Varieties* is in its wide scope of subjects run parallel to his earlier major work *Principle of Psychology* (1994: 27). Gary T. Alexander underscores critically the ignorance about James' *Varieties* within the current literature of psychology of religion. And he asks a significant question regarding the relationship between James' earlier epoch-making work, *The Principles of Psychology*, and his later work on religion which is based on psychological analysis of great deal of personal experiences from many different persons, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1979: 421). Considering his own question Alexander claims that there is a connection and continuity between these two works: there is no break with his original insight but an expansion of it based on his view on experience (1979: 422).

But there is also some critics regarding James' claim about science of religions. Comstock emphasizes that there is a dismissal from various sides of philosophical and religious stands. James' arguments do convince neither religious orthodoxies nor the positivistic climate of his time. Though this mutually excluding positions take a similar stand against James' views and labelling it as unphilosophical and accusing it in terms of lacking any technical rigor (Comstock, 1967: 187). Leuba calls attention to James' meticulous psychological analysis of religious experience but question James' ambiguous appeal to the science of religions instead of providing a systematic treatise on the psychology of religious experience as expected (1904: 322-323). Likewise, David Wulff proposes a critical approach towards James which claims that James' *Varieties* was "largely general ... for in James *elaborated neither a specific theory nor a particular method*, beyond the judicious use of personal documents." Thus, he is not considered, against his claim in the *Varieties*, as a scientist of religion and rarely comes to the agenda of the scholars of the religious studies (quoted from Taves, 2003: 305).

In contrast to Wulff and Leuba, Forsyth concurs with Alexander's claim regarding the ignorance of founding figures within the literature of psychology of religion. But he also differs from his including James within the limits of such ignorance. As to him, James' *Varieties* is an exception in the realm of religious studies. And he asks why it is so. He then concludes this interest in him can be understood in terms of contemporary dialogue between psychology and theology (1982: 402). Jo Pearson argues that in the *Varieties* there is no fulfilling space for the ritual which is essential to understand religious experience at large. Though Pearson admits that in James' time there is a critical distance in theory regarding rituals (2003: 414). Yet Pearson argues against those who claim that in large quotation of personal biographical experiences of others

what James is just doing a reiteration of those documents. Pearson thus admits that there is still something more which deserves to be delved into (2003: 419).

Leigh Eric Schmidt contends that the historical excavation of modern mysticism is “a delicate undertaking in which the historian acts as archeologist dusting away sedimented layers to arrive at an array of subtle shifts and everyday frictions” and adds that it is obvious that mysticism by the turn of the twentieth century become “as the quintessence of religious experience” (2003: 276). Yet, a significant objection to these views comes from a distinct source, from Richard Rorty, a leading and transforming name in the agenda of the contemporaneous pragmatism. Rorty claims that James’ employment of the concepts both religious and experience is ambiguous, for Rorty criticizes that James does not clarify the meaning of the terms (2004: 86-87). On the other hand, Rorty admits that there is a great benefit for continuing to read James’ *The Varieties of Religious Experience*; not because of the actuality of its conclusion left behind, but for its potential to make us a moral person like James’ himself (2004: 96-97).

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WILLIAM JAMES: DİNİ DENEYİM, DİNLER BİLİMİ VE MİSTİSİZM

Ümit KARTAL

ÖZ

Dini tecrübe özellikle on dokuzuncu yüzyıldan itibaren eleştirel düşünmenin tartışma odaklarından birini oluşturmuştur. Burada metodolojik bakımdan iki temel ayrımından söz edilebilir: dini tecrübenin dinin kurumsal yanıyla veya kişisel tecrübeyle kesiştiği ufukta incelenmesi. William James *Dini Tecrübenin Muhtelif Boyutları* yapıtında sözü edilen ikinci yöntemin ayırt edici düzeyde kurucu bir örneğini sunar. Dini tecrübeyi kişisel uğrağında ele almak onun özgün bir veçhesini öne çıkarır: mistisizm. James bu yapıtında kişisel tecrübenin sınırında dini tecrübeye yaklaşırken ciddi genişlikte bir belge çözümlemesine girişir. Bununla birlikte kendisinin psikolojinin kurucu babalarından biri olduğu hesaba katılsa da James'in burada yaptığı yalnızca bir din psikolojisi değildir. James bu yapıtta geniş malzemenin sunduğu belirsizliğe karşın eldeki meseleye ilişkin fikir birliği sunmayı arzu eder. James bu geniş belge dağarcığının çözümlemesinden yola çıkarak bir dinler bilimi ortaya koymaya çalışır. Bu arayış ifadenin yanılısamaya açıklığının tetiklediği gibi dini bilime indirgemek değildir, çünkü James dini tecrübenin kendine özgü bir mantığı gereksediğinin fazlasıyla farkındadır. Bu bağlamda, eldeki çalışmada, James'in dini tecrübeye ilişkin yaklaşımı onun yapıtı temel alınarak incelenecektir. Çalışma yönetsel olarak betimleyici bir tutum sergilemekle birlikte, bu tutumun amacı James'in yapıtının güncelliğine işaret etmektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dini deneyim, mistisizm, dinler bilimi, iyimserlik, ahlaki yaşam