

## A HERMENEUTIC APPROACH TO MYSTICISM IN THE LIGHT OF WILLIAM JAMES VIEW ON MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES

**Okoli Izuchukwu Kizito**

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka  
[izk.okoli@unizik.edu.ng](mailto:izk.okoli@unizik.edu.ng)

**Chris O. Abakare**

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka  
[oc.abakare@unizik.edu.ng](mailto:oc.abakare@unizik.edu.ng)

### **Abstract**

Mysticism, the practice of becoming one with the absolute is referred to as an alteration of the mind or consciousness which is obviously different from normal human state or expression. It is characterized greatly on reduction of external awareness with expansion of mental and spiritual consciousness in attainment of insights accompanied by self-revealing visions. Mystical experiences on another angle, shares a purported super sense perceptual-unitive experience with an ultimate being that grants acquaintance of the kind not generally accessible by way of sense- perception or somatosensory modalities. William James writes that personal religious or mystical experiences have its root in mystical state of consciousness. He understands his own experience of uniting with the absolute psychologically but this does not eliminate his philosophy of individual moments of religious transcendence; feelings of opinion and consciousness of space and time. Mysticism for him is a precise state of mind where the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance and grasped by a superior power. Mystical experience for him therefore is a form of transcendence and the mystic will often feel merged with something greater. This has increased the quest for truth and generates philosophical interest on knowledge-approving mystical experiences. Since the method of Hermeneutics entails interpretation of meanings, the interest of this research work however is to interpret mysticism in the light of William James view on it; to offer a legitimate supplement of his thought and to accommodate the epistemological concerns that surround the mystic's claim in his concept of mystical experiences. This study concludes that there is no subjective message from the mystic that can fly for certainty of knowledge and it recommends the qualities of traditional mysticism to enhance understanding of mystical experiences and its related issues associated with the contemporary times. It will also provide a deeper admiration and exposition of William James philosophy for more Epistemological, Metaphysical and Religious apprehensions.

**Keywords:** Mysticism, metaphysical, somatosensory, consciousness, experience.

### **Introduction**

It is not without an irony that philosophers in the twentieth century have developed an argument for the existence of God from issues relating to mystical or religious experiences. As man therefore, continues to make progress in his quest for answers that

could serve as a pointer to truth, what defines his emotion, socialization and unification to an ultimate being, the need for necessary and existential truths still abounds and glares philosophers on the face.

The dialectics of life unfolds philosophy's ardent desire for coherence and certainty. Whether man lives and survives as a natural or personal being; whether he exists in the realm of the Christian God, transcending into the voice of or for the ultimate. Whether he is demonstrating his own Psychology or whatever inducement and deceitfully returning with an experience as the voice of God or gods; making some mystical claims as one who hears directly from a super-spiritual being above. Researchers are therefore motivated to revisit the phenomenon of mysticism; to interpret its dominant philosophical approach in the foundation thoughts of William James. A host of individuals out of ignorance of the reality of mysticism has fallen prey in the name of 'thus says the lord'. Stories of pseudo experiences abound although one thing is common here: Mysticism which is a unitive experience of human and an absolute being in return with a precise state of mind is a reality in William James but in contemporary times, the associated events, begs for more clarity and interpretation with epistemological acquaintance. As much as ignorance is not an excuse, the researchers want to use Hermeneutics to interpret Mystical experiences in William James to its knowledge-approving extent because people tend to live better when they know better. This understanding creates a path to Mysticism with its demand for scholastic clarity; offering Hermeneutics for the satisfaction of common-sensual beliefs which has generated much controversy.

Many thinkers concurs to the fact that regardless of whether one is a religious person or not, one thing that should be clear to him is the fact that religion or mystical experiences exist. This makes the book *Varieties of Religious experience* in William James very essential and this equally makes this research very significant because the mystics claim is purported on self-revealing visions and philosophical interest arose on allegedly knowledge-approving "mystical experiences. It is of common opinion that his thoughts supports the psychology of religious or mystical experiences and this is why many considered it be an essential work in the history of science as he sought to convince his colleagues in psychology of the existence of realities that lay beyond laboratory experience. William James work under study is more relevant in our contemporary times than when it was published because using gripping first person accounts of conversion and mystical experience, he addressed the most profound of life's meaning with compelling clarity, nuance and even humour. It explains mysticism in different backgrounds and makes analysis of what a mystic should be and how best to manage mystical claims.

Hence, this work is advancement into the deeper knowledge of the truth which will play an important role in a hermeneutic context.

### **Conceptual Analysis**

**Mysticism** is popularly known as becoming one with God or the Absolute, but may refer to any kind of religious ecstasy or altered state of consciousness which is given a religious or spiritual meaning. It may also refer to the attainment of insight in ultimate or hidden truths, and to human transformation supported by various practices and experiences. The mystical experience is not unique to Christianity alone, there are Jewish mystics, Islamic

mystics and religions like Buddhism too lay a very great emphasis on mystical experience. It is therefore not restricted to great saints, prophets or spiritual teachers.

(James, 1902) defines mystical experiences as experiences of man in relation to 'whatever they consider divine', and further defines that as a belief in an unseen metaphysical order with which we can have a relationship. However, people have experiences very similar to those he describes – feelings of expansion, awe, wonder, surrender, ecstasy – without believing in an unseen moral order or Almighty Being. Mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge... They are illuminations, revelations full of significance and importance... and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority. James additionally touches on the blandness of these insights and their provision of “that deepened sense of the significance of a maxim or formula which occasionally sweeps over one. I have heard that said all my life, we exclaim, but I never realized its full meaning up until now. Presumably James might have had something in mind like, 'Love makes the world go around' (Martin, 2011).

James proposes a definition of mysticism based on four marks that, for him, characterize all mystical experience: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency and passivity. His next step is to provide some examples of such experience, including the effects of alcohol, nitrous oxide, and chloroform, before turning to first person accounts of mystical experience. James casts a wide net, looking not just at Christianity but other faith traditions, noting that in the study of mysticism, “We must next pass to its methodical cultivation as an element of the religious life. Hindus, Buddhists, Mohammedans, and Christian all have cultivated it methodically.” After providing examples from these traditions for the reader he concludes that mystical experience resembles the knowledge given to us in sensations more than that given by conceptual thought.

Are mystical experiences veridical? This has raised serious scholastic concerns as this study reveals further, more philosophical thoughts. Even James seems to have thought so but believed that the answer to this question was unknowable. So instead, he suggests that we should judge this kind of experience by its fruits. Does it have a transformative effect on someone's life that is lasting and positive?

### **Varieties of Religious Experience**

The Varieties of Religious Experience consists of William James' Gifford Lectures on natural theology, which he delivered at the University of Edinburgh during the first three years of the 20th century.

For Robert Abzug, William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* is one of the most profound and profoundly influential books ever written by an American intellectual. He was enthralled by its first-person narratives of spiritual melancholy and ecstasy as well as James's vivid characterizations of the “once-born,” the “twice-born,” and “the reality of the unseen.” Later, as a scholar, he came to value its unique window on the tumultuous world of late-nineteenth-century American scientific and religious culture. In the years since its publication, the book has piqued the interest of generation after generation of the lay public and remains a touchstone for students of religion, psychology, and intellectual history. Little wonder Luke Rowley observes that:

The varieties of religious experience will show one that spirituality is not limited to church and that you too can benefit from trying a variety of religious practices, even if you identify with no religion in particular.

*The Varieties of Religious Experience* may be a bit outdated, and some of its ideas may seem somewhat dangerous; after all, Mussolini said that it was this book which taught him that an action should be judged by its result rather than by its doctrinal basis. Even so, it is a book which as James' fellow pragmatist Pierce said, penetrates deep into the hearts of people; and it will undoubtedly be debated for many years to come just as it has been for over a century now.

All to its appeal has been James's focus on individual spiritual life rather than churches, theologies, rituals, and symbols. In one of the many remarkable first-person narratives he reproduced, according to Taylor, a Frenchman tells how one evening, while plagued by a "general depression of spirits," he was overcome by a terrifying panic. There fell upon me without warning, he wrote, just as if it came out of the darkness, a horrible fear of my own existence. He realized that in a moment fate might reduce him to the state of a patient he had recently observed at an asylum who sat "like a sort of sculptured Egyptian cat or Peruvian mummy, moving nothing but his black eyes and looking absolutely non-human." He so feared becoming like that boy "that it was as if something hitherto solid within my breast gave way entirely and I became a mass of quivering fear." For days on end, the Frenchmen awoke with a horrible dread at the pit of my stomach and with a sense of the insecurity of life that it never knew before and that I have never felt since. For months, he could not go out alone in the dark alone.

So invasive and powerful was the terror, he wrote, that only clinging to phrases from the Bible—"the eternal God is my refuge" or "I am the resurrection and the life" and other phrases, saved him from going really insane. The Frenchman of the story was William James himself. The crisis he disguised in *Varieties* and other episodes of altered realities that he experienced over a lifetime drove him to devote much of his intellectual energy to an open-ended scientific exploration of what some called spiritual and religious worlds and what James termed "consciousness beyond the margin." He sought to convince his colleagues in psychology of the existence of realities that lay beyond laboratory observation and normal experience. An invitation from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland to give the Gifford Lectures on religion allowed him to speculate on these extra-normal moments from a different angle: How are we to understand those extraordinary experiences of consciousness often associated with religious illumination?

James gave his answers to packed audiences at Edinburgh and published the lectures as *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1902. Using gripping first-person accounts of conversion and mystical experience, he addressed the most profound issues of life's meaning with compelling clarity, nuance, and even humor. He saw in these narratives clear evidence for what he called the reality of the unseen, ample justification to include human connections to invisible worlds within the scientific study of human consciousness. At the same time, James remained wary about defining the nature of that reality. Yes, he seemed to be saying, these individuals experienced something real beyond normal consciousness and perhaps even in the realm of the transcendent—that realm

beyond everyday experience that human beings often identified as central to their spiritual lives. However, James cautioned, all specific descriptions, lessons, theologies, and confirmations of faith represented “over-belief” originating from the realm of human culture and not from the divine. (Abzug, 2012)

James knew that he was walking a tightrope. He worried, half in jest, that Varieties would add fuel to the fire that burns in the hearts of God's enemies as well as to that which burns in those of his friends. In fact, its careful and ultimately open-ended treatment of both materialist science and formal religion, coupled with lengthy and non-judgmental presentation of the experiences of real people, presented readers wide latitude as they engaged the text.

For Abzug therefore, People rarely get a full sense of James's take on religion in his own words—the wonderful turns of phrase and plainspoken, often humorous, arguments about the relation of madness to religion; his championing of a radical empiricism that recognizes spiritual as well as material facts; or his doubts that any theology could faithfully reflect the blinding ecstasy of religious experience. Nor do they experience the elegance and force of his overall argument.

This maintains the background of William James thoughts on the Varieties. However, the topics of his lectures that generated much controversies and needed its summary be showcased will follow suit in the next sub-chapter.

There were originally twenty of them, but this study has a few encapsulated topics less than that number since it groups those which explored similar topics.

### **The Reality of the Unseen**

Vague impressions of something indefinable have no place in the rationalistic system, writes William James in this chapter, Nevertheless, he immediately adds giving an apology for his interest in religious experiences, if we look on man's whole mental life as it exists, on the life of men that lies in them apart from their learning and science, and that they inwardly and privately follow, we have to confess that the part of it of which rationalism can give an account is relatively superficial. William James opines that:

*It is the part that has the prestige undoubtedly, for it has the loquacity, it can challenge you for proofs, and chop logic, and put you down with words... Your whole subconscious life, your impulses, your faiths, your needs, your divinations, have prepared the premises, of which your consciousness now feels the weight of the result; and something in you absolutely knows that that result must be truer than any logic-chopping rationalistic talk, however clever, that may contradict it.*

### **The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness**

The fourth and fifth of James' Gifford lecture are grouped under the same title: The Religion of Healthy, Mindedness. Interestingly enough, in retrospect, what James is talking about in this chapter – terming it America's principal contribution to religion – is actually what we should nowadays call it positive thinking. Finding its origins in

Emerson, Whitman and Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science, James calls this "the religion of healthy-mindedness," or "the religion of the mind-cure" In the case of these people, James thinks, the religious experience is the product of happiness and an optimistic outlook; they don't believe in evil and bad things since both of them can be neutralized through a positive attitude.

These are the once-born, the people who can live a life of sustained happiness; they don't need a religion different than optimism.

### **The Sick Soul**

There's also another group, a group of people whose souls are sick from birth, since, unlike the once-born, they believe that the world is fundamentally evil and these are the morbid-minded people.

Unfortunately, in the eyes of James, morbid-mindedness ranges over the wider scale of experience, since many people suffer on a daily basis and the healthy-minded are all but incapable for prolonged suffering.

So that these morbid-minded people can experience happiness, they need to be born a second time; this is why James calls their religious experiences, the religious experiences of the twice-born. To these people, finding religion means finally finding a cure for unhappiness. (James, 1902)

### **Conversion**

In lectures nine and ten, Rowley reminded us that James spent some time discussing the nature and the effects of religious conversion. For some reasons, he says, religion gives people the power and the impetus to change their habits and even their character.

In some cases, religious conversions result in a profound change affecting the core being of an individual. There are persons in whom, writes James are quite independently of any exhaustion in the Subject's capacity for feeling, or even in the absence of any acute previous feeling, the higher condition, having reached the due degree of energy, bursts through all barriers and sweeps in like a sudden flood. He notes that "these are the most striking and memorable cases, the cases of instantaneous conversion to which the conception of divine grace has been most peculiarly attached."

### **Key Lessons from the Varieties of Religious Experience**

**In Healthy-Mindedness and Morbid-Mindedness, it implies that** some people are born healthy-minded, and others are born morbid-minded; the former are capable of sustaining happiness, the latter think that they are doomed to suffer through life. Positive thinking is, more or less, the only religion the first group of people needs; however, the second can only become healthy-minded through some sort of religious conversion. That's why William James calls the former "the once-born" and the latter "the twice-born."

**On Saintliness: Traits and Effects,** There are four traits which describe a saintly person and which lead to four different practical effects. The traits in question are: a feeling that the world is more than what we can see; a sense that there is an Ideal Power which exists in you as well; an immense elation and freedom; and a shifting from a no-state to a yes-state

of being.

These four traits lead to four practical consequences: asceticism, strength of soul, purity, and charity hence, mysticism can also be defined within the limits of these four qualities which are: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity. The first two are general and describe all mystical experiences; the latter two can often be found in them, but are sometimes absent and are subsidiary, (Rowley, 2019).

### **Societal implications of mystical claims**

Religion or the concept of the spiritual is one vehicle that have conveyed the personal life of many. Its practice is one which promotes the wellbeing of individuals, family and community and irrationality that comes with it can either put in shape or mars the nucleus of ones being. One of the greatest problems of this modern world is lack of Rationality, scientism and certainty in mysticism. Although mystical positions and utterances are probably as old as humanity but nevertheless, studies on the nature remain one of the vital reconciliations of existentialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is highly worrisome, let alone an assertion from Ralph Lewis which made it clear that “our subjective perceptions are arrestingly compelling, yet highly unreliable”

This cannot but bring in Betrand Russel's assertion that some people drink too much and see snakes while others fast too much and see God. It becomes unfortunate that the experiences that are mystical can as well be caused by certain things away from religion which includes LSD, Cannabis, Psilocybin amongst others as seen earlier in this work.(Karlin, 2011)

In our world of today, many instances have ravaged the mind and brought forward, the grounds to which many have gone wrong. Many families have broken, mothers have become witches to their own children. . .brothers have fought dirty and many erroneously sent financial packages to spiritual places, the list is endless; due to religious or mystical claims from an authority whom people feared that God revealed this or that to him. However, the researcher is not denying the possibility of religious experience but instead, affirms that it could come from a dream or vision which is a firsthand experience and utterly convincing to that person but this is not simply an argument based on logic or reason. It could therefore be argued that all these experiences happens in the mind and no one understands the complexities of the human mind and perhaps, it can play tricks on making us think we experienced God.

The argument maintains that special episodes, such as seeing visions of Mary or hearing the voice of God, as well as the more experience of “living in God's presence” or of “absolute dependence upon a higher power,” evidence of God as their source. Although such experiences may be accepted as having occurred, their cause, as critics have noted, might be purely natural. To establish that the experiences are real, as experiences, is not to establish that they are caused by an omniscient, succinctly put it, when someone says that God has spoken to him in a dream, this “is no more than to say he dreamed that God spoke to him”

The argument, from miracles to God as their cause, is more complex and involves two sets of problems. The argument may assert that the children of Israel were miraculously rescued from or Jesus was miraculously raised from the dead and therefore that God must

exist as the agent of these miracles. The first problem concerns the reports. Whereas in the case of private religious experiences the skeptic (to whom the argument is addressed) may well be willing to grant that such experiences occurred, in the case of public miracles the skeptic will require adequate evidence for the described event; and this is not forthcoming for the classic stories referring to extraordinary events of many centuries ago. There are, however, well-evidenced contemporary accounts of “miraculous” healings and other remarkable mystical utterances on the assumption that some of these, and also some of the classic miracle or conversion stories, were from divine, again, the same problem arises. How can it be established that these events were caused by divine intervention rather than by the operation of natural phenomena? If this is a difficult adventure, at most, what is the nature of its veridicality?

### **Mystical Experiences: The Road to Certainty?**

William James is of the view that mystical experience should be accepted and pass as a tool for knowledge as it is authoritative for an individual, although not for the observer, even if the mystical experience does suggest other modes of knowledge and truth. It should be so because mystical experiences like ordinary perception, involves face to face presentations of what seems immediately to exist, and provides evidence no less than given by the senses. This opinion was clearly captured by (Gale, 1991) in Ellen Kappy whose words thus were more captivating and appealing:

If you came this way, taking any route, starting from anywhere, at any time or at any season, it would always be the same: you would have to put off sense and notion. You are not here to verify, instruct yourself or inform curiosity or carry report; you are here to kneel where prayer has been valid.

If we go through the history of mysticism, we find that mystics belonging to different traditions have declared, again and again, the authenticity or certainty of their supernatural experiences which are as cogent and vivid as any other ordinary experiences. When mystics say that their experiences are ineffable, it does not mean that their knowledge is obscure or confused; they feel the certitude of their knowledge.

In spite of the certain experience, the mystics feel the difficulty in expressing their experience. But the difficulty is not due to lack of clarity in their knowledge but because of the limitations of language itself which is mind-made. The critics of mysticism fail to understand the position of the mystics due to the following wrong assumptions that Consciousness is synonymous with the mind, mind is the only possible instrument of knowledge and that a thought must accompany verbal expression.

To these points above, (Venkatalashmi, 1996) understands that the whole Philosophy of Mystical experiences and whether it leads us to certainty as seen in most Philosophers cannot be verified the way a map is verified. It can only be done in an extraordinary sense. One does not have the authority to deny anybody of experience just because one has not experienced it. If one considers the rationalist and empiricist traditions, one finds that certainty is seen in the first-person experience either in the form of the immediately given sense-experience (the empiricist option) or in the form of the apprehension of clear

ideas in a self-evidential intuition (the rationalist option). Little wonder Sri challenges the normal experiential assessments on grounds which we ordinarily formulate knowledge-claim. He observes that:

the dialectical intellect is not a sufficient judge of essential or spiritual truths, moreover, very often, but its propensity to deal with works, and abstract ideas as if they were binding realities, it wears them as chains and does not look freely beyond them to the essential and total facts of our existence. Intellectual statement is an account to our intelligence and justification by reasoning of a sense of things which pre-exist in our turn of mind or temperament or in some tendency of our nature and secretly predetermines the very reasoning that claims to lead to it. That reasoning itself can be conclusive only if the perception of things on which it rests is both a true and a whole seeming.

What then can we deduce? Mystical experiences are for the individual, an original experience although personal, James holds it as a form of knowledge which the mystic has already. It is existing within his consciousness to be discussed, experienced or to be watered down. This is in itself, an important Epistemological concern for it splits into objective Epistemology and subjective knowledge but to what possibility? If one can have knowledge of and all to himself, it therefore implies that mystical experience is veridical but the researcher at this juncture is worried and makes bold to react to this subjective understanding especially as fronted by Sri which appears to mean that mystical experiences can be verified. The implication of this Philosophy is that those whom mystical utterances have impacted negatively on should swallow it hook and sinker because, the mystic in his personal experience can always be right. This position is faulty as it ignites more fundamental questions as: what is knowledge? To what extent can that which is personal pass as knowledge for humanity? What exactly does personal knowledge imply?

Moreover, individuals rather than groups undergo religious experiences but we only have one person's testimony as to what has happened *eg* St Bernadette testified that the Virgin Mary had spoken to her but witnesses to the experience stated that they did not see or hear the Virgin Mary and only saw Bernadette talking to an 'unseen' someone. Mystical experience is like emotion, it is a personal response, which means that any form of empirical testing is useless. They are regarded as subjective because no objective criteria can be applied to them in order to judge to their merit, authenticity or anything else.

A subjective experience cannot be offered as 'scientific'; that is, as empirical or intellectual proof. This is basically because experiences happen to people, and will always be open to interpretation. It would appear that those who encounter these experiences portray the being revealed to them quite differently. In some cases it is clearly the God of their respective faith, in other cases it would appear to be a deity quite distinct from the God of formal or organized religion. Again for some, it is simply the force of nature; How can we then verify the authenticity if the experiences are so different?

In many cases, drugs or alcohol can produce very similar effects to a religious experience. In *The Varieties*, James refers to experiments using nitrous oxide and anaesthetics. He suggests that, when mixed sufficiently with air, these substances 'stimulate the mystical consciousness in an extraordinary degree'. If this is the case can we rely on people's accounts?

Another problem is that most writers held something in common without their knowledge of it, which is that their mystical experience is ineffable yet, they pass information to people... this is a contradiction. One further epistemological worry accompanies mystical experience James claimed is that, while mystical experiences proved authoritative grounds for belief in the person experiencing them, they cannot give grounds for a person to whom the experience is reported. In other words, my experience is evidence for me, but not for you. This claim can be understood in a way that aptly suggest that a mystic ought to pass on with his experience.

How then can we solve this dilemma? The researcher believes that the consolidation to the arguments here is for all to checkmate mystical or religious experiences from traditional characteristics of a mystic although a saying goes that "a mystic is not a special kind of person; each person is a special kind of mystic" it is possible still to make some basic and common characteristics of them which Kenneth Leech in his book *Prayer and Prophecy*, affirmed that mystics would never presume to call themselves one; anyone who brags about the badge of honor is not a mystic.

- Mystics are virtuous
- Mystics are kind and compassionate
- Love is central to their identity and consciousness
- Mystics bring the presence of God into the lives of others and they do so by bringing love into all situations even the most troubled ones.
- Mystics recognize spiritual depth regardless of one's religious label.
- Mystics take their spiritual practice seriously; they do not take it for granted.
- Mystics rely on grace and wonder: they know their spirituality is not entirely under their control.
- Mystics are comfortable with ambiguity, paradox and unknowing.

For (Underhill, 2012), true mystics are practical and their aims are wholly transcendental and spiritual. They are in no way concerned with adding to, exploring, re-arranging or improving anything on the visible universe.

However, let us not take for granted, advice from the scripture on how to spot whether a mystical experience is true or deluded. Prophet Jeremiah once stated that "as for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of the prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the lord has truly sent the prophet" St Theresa augmented this scriptural context as a way of validating or rejecting mystical experiences to either come from God or devil. She promoted human intuition and conviction of the soul as well as the effects or

ethical implications as tangible yardsticks for certainty thereby emphasizing that any revelation from God must be compatible or in conformity with Holy Scripture: "As far as I can see and learn by experience, the soul must be convinced that a thing comes from God only if it is in conformity with Holy Scripture.

Secondly, Saint Teresa emphasizes the relation between her experiences and spirituality: "When a locution comes from the devil it not only fails to leave behind good effects but leaves bad ones. This has happened to me, though only on two or three occasions, and each time I have immediately been warned by the Lord that the locution came from the devil. Besides being left in a state of great aridity, the soul suffers a disquiet (Peers, 1960).

Moreover, just so that it does not appear that efforts are made for Christians alone to verify through the scriptures while others remain with the troubles of Mystical experiences in the case of many who would see themselves as spiritual but not religious, the resolution of a research carried out at the University of Nottingham in the 1990s provided a powerful conclusion that more than 60 percent of people interviewed, claimed to have had some sort of significant religious experience. Some people who have made these claims *eg.* Martin Luther King Jr, are well respected. The status of an individual and his antecedents is therefore placed high here.

### **The relevance of William James Mysticism to contemporary times.**

At this point, many mind boggling questions are entertained... this goes a long way to familiarize with metaphysics and its relevance in our society today. Many scholars have questioned the usefulness of William James Philosophy dated many years ago and it is seen under careful study that William James Philosophy is more relevant nowadays than those antiquity stages. The debate summarized in this work has been the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century where humanity is deceived to believe and experience what was passed onto them in what ordinarily can even appear in their mystical state of consciousness.

Central to its appeal has been James focus on individual spiritual life rather than churches, theologies, rituals and symbols. We saw in the varieties, clear evidence for what he called the "reality of the unseen", which is an ample justification to include human connections to invisible worlds within the scientific study of human consciousness. At the same time, James remained wary about defining the nature of the reality, yes, he seemed to be saying, these individuals experienced something real beyond normal consciousness and perhaps even in the realm of the transcendent- that realm beyond everyday experience that human beings often identified as central to their spiritual lives. However, Robert hints on the caveat of James to most specific descriptions, lessons, theologies and confirmations of faith is that most represented "over beliefs" originating from the realm of human culture and wants and not from the divine.

William James philosophy was brought in to address the question of psychology which was placed side by side with mysticism of both the religious and the spiritual and this study is an eye opener that a union with the divine is possible but to what inducement?

In her article, Leib describes the importance of William James work, stating that he was committed to devising a philosophy that would provide a foundation for spiritual experience, and to opening up room for faith in an increasingly secular world. With an understanding of physiology, psychology, and philosophy, James studied cases of

religious inspiration and concluded there were specific aspects of human consciousness that contained energies that could come to a person's assistance in time of great need. In his day, intellectuals through the *Varieties...*, knows better and tended to categorize some religious experiences as no more than deceit.

*The Varieties...* portrays the need for a sense of the spiritual as a natural and healthy psychological function. His interest was not in religious institutions and their rituals but rather the individual experience in relationship to whatever that person considered sacred or divine. In lecture three, James writes that most people have a sense of the presence of evil as well as that of good. Mystical experiences are those rare, brief experiences in which a person senses the presence of God. The opposite sensation—that of evil presents itself in the form of something unpleasant. These feelings often cannot be explained and therefore cannot be proven. This lies in conflict with philosophical rationalism, which discounts mysticism. His point here reconciles with St Theresa's apology on some form of mysticism that could come from the devil and as such, she provided useful grounds of certainty.

The possibility of unitive experience that comes with mystical experiences produces some societal effects in its varying degrees of advantages or disadvantages and this again is where William James work is essential as his discussions of the once-born and-twice born, healthy and morbid mindedness and again, his idea of conversion, covers the psychological foundations of mystical experiences. Therefore, mysticism and the mystics claim is as such what James describes as that which psychology produces in the mystical state of consciousness. Looking at this, the researcher observes thus:

William James philosophy is one of Metaphysical, Ethical and Epistemological reconciliation; it provides enabling grounds for mental alertness. It is one which handles depression and dictates a better way of existence; a new way of life. It is one which reminds us of the afterlife in strict preparation of death; it is the Philosophy of how best to live a life, therefore, it is more relevant in the world of today than the days of Edinburgh lectures.

## **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, it's no longer the case that mystical experiences are real...it is that which is possible with man; it is in fact, one of the characteristics of a man whether religiously motivated or psychologically otherwise. The question of mysticism in James is to unravel the psychology of the experience that comes thereafter. Issues were there since understanding him and his Philosophy was an inconclusive enterprise. What is seen is varieties of individual thoughts on what they think he might have meant in his lectures. One fundamental and all time issue that this research work solved is the fact that there is no way to absolutely prove the truth of personal mystical experience. In fact, many so-called mystical experiences may well be the outcome of mental illness, epilepsy, or drug-induced hallucinations. Nevertheless, religious and psychological scholars and researchers tend to agree that the experiences of bonafide mystics are meaningful and important. Some of the arguments that support this perspective include the universality of

mystical experience which has been a part of human experience throughout history, around the world, regardless of factors related to age, gender, wealth, education, or religion, the impact of mystical experience: many mystical experiences have had profound and hard-to-explain impacts on people around the world. Joan of Arc's visions, for example, led to the French victory in the Hundred Years' War and lastly the inability of neurologists and other contemporary scientists to explain at least some mystical experiences as being "all in the head."

In hermeneutic foundation therefore, it was exposed that mystical experiences are for the individual, an original experience although personal, James observes it as a form of knowledge which the mystic has already. Most scholars strictly believed that it is existing within the mystic's consciousness to be described, explained or to be watered down. This is in itself, an important Epistemological and subjective knowledge of and all to himself which raised other issues as to what is knowledge and to what extent can it be made personal. This counters this very subjective claim above. It therefore implies that mystical experience which is ineffable cannot be generally verified but then can be managed for its truthfulness or falsity which cannot but save some fundamental societal mistakes.

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