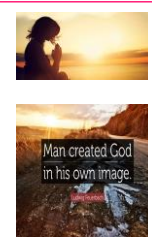
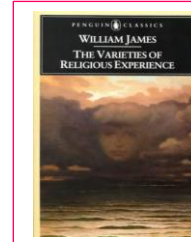
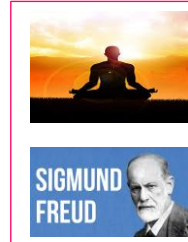


## Paper 1: June 4<sup>th</sup> 2019 Morning: Religious Experience

Religious Experience an encounter with the Divine that is either direct/indirect, public/private, describable/indescribable and said Swinburne.. RE is a personal "I thou" not "I it" relationship said Martin Buber. Practical topic.



William James was a philosopher and psychologist. His classic book, "The Varieties of Religious Experience", provided a survey of religious experiences and what they infer. **RE was the heart of religion.** It is the feelings people have in their solitude relating to the Divine. Beliefs and practices were second-hand religion as people reflect later on their experiences in their theological system. They flow from RE. James accepted that there may be a psychological or physiological explanation to religious experience. **But this way not be the whole explanation. There might be a supernatural and natural cause.** What is important when we judge experiences is to see their effects (fruit) not their causes (their root). St Paul's conversion may have been an epileptic episode but it may also be genuine. For James, there is a common core of characteristics to all religious experiences, particularly mystical ones. 1. **First, they are ineffable.** RE is beyond proper description. Words cannot express what is felt. The most obvious mark of religious experiences. **Only someone that has been in love understands love or only a musician can truly hear a symphony.** The ineffable encounter needs directly experienced. 2. **Second, they have a noetic quality. They have the property of imparting knowledge.** "Insights into depths of truth, illustrations, revelations, full of significance." The person who has the experience feels that they have gained a deep and direct knowledge of God deeper than everyday events. Revelations have a "curious sense of authority." 3. **Third, the experience is transient. It usually passes with time, usually lasting half an hour or less but the effects can be long lasting.** 4. **Fourth, there is a sense of passivity.** The experiencer has a sense that that something superior is acting upon them, they are not contributing anything to the experience, they do not have the leading role. The experience cannot be summoned. **The believer is grasped and held by a superior power. RE are honest "over beliefs."** More real than the laws of logic. **James' conclusions rest on key principles:** 1. James is a **pragmatist.** Truth is not fixed but truth is whatever works for us and in real life. Given the effects of religious experience, we should to conclude they are true. Pragmatism argues that a theory must be treated as true if it works in practice. *When judging whether these experiences are genuine, what is important is not the cause (root) but the effects they have (the fruit).* **James said we must judge the religious life by its result.** 2. James is **committed to an empirical approach.** We cannot empirically verify the experience, **the result of the experience is empirical data.** If a former criminal is now living a good and religious life following conversion, this can be observed by the senses. Observations via senses lead to understanding of the world. 3. **Pluralism: James' research into different faiths let him to conclude that there were similarities.** The experiences are interpreted differently depending on views and belief systems. If they produce positive effects, they are true in some sense and there is truth in all faiths. There is truth in many faiths. **Religious experiences "point with reasonable probability to the continuity of our consciousness with a wider, spiritual environment".** They show we can "experience union with something larger" than us, finding greatest peace. *They lead to a patient heart. "Fruits of Spirit" said St. Paul in Galatians 5 – peace, joy, kindness. RE like good medicine produces good effects.*

**James stops short of saying religious experiences prove God.** There are many types of consciousness. **Like a drunken man, who is put in another state by alcohol, a mystic may be able to access different states of consciousness.** Not everyone can access these and **James distinguished between the ordinary man and spiritual man.** James believed the world we see is part of the spiritual universe. **To unite with the higher universe is our main purpose .** **Spiritual energy flows through prayer and meditation.** *Religion provides people with a new zest for life, assurance of safety, sense of peace and love in relationships.*

**Mysticism:** William James thought religious experiences mainly/ had its roots in the mystical. **Mystical experiences are where God or ultimate reality are directly experienced and there is a sense of the oneness of things.**

**Visions and Voices.** St Theresa of Avila described Christ by her side. *She thought tests (of positive change, peace, links to church teaching) check genuineness of these.* **FC Happold** found mystics saw the world coming from "Divine Ground" known intuitively (not rationally). Mystics believe in an eternal self that is the divine spark allowing us to connect with such truths. **Their purpose is to discover or eternal self and unite with the divine around.**

**Rudolf Otto challenges the idea that religious experience is intimate or shows the unity in all things.** In his book *The Idea of the Holy*, religious experience is described as **numinous.** *This is an experience of awe and wonder in the presence of God. We are not so much united with God but aware of our insignificance in his presence.* A tremendous, terrifying, fascinating and compelling mystery or **Mysterium tremendum et fascinans** - awe and wonder in presence of an almighty God. Could be part of all experiences. God not known by logic.

**Conversion involves someone altering their beliefs and way of life.** Like Saint Paul in Acts 9. It could happen **gradually over time** or be **sudden.** **James writes of a "shifting of energies"**. He gives the example of the President who thinks little of politics when fishing on his day off. Religious beliefs and identity, previously peripheral, **come to the centre of a person's consciousness.** **James suggests the subconscious may explain conversion in a similar way to a hypnotic state but this psychological explanation need not be the whole explanation.** The 19th century psychologist **Edwin Starbuck's** drew parallels with the normal process of development and finding our identity in adolescence. He studied Christian conversions alongside non-religious adolescents. **He found most conversions occurred between the ages of 14-17.** Adolescents go through anxiety/ incompleteness before finding relief and a sense of identity. **Religious conversion is a normal process of growing up and finding one's identity.** *These conversions can be gradual (volitional) or sudden (self-surrender). In response to crisis, the religious ideas replace other dominant ones.* **HD Lewis** describes the pattern of conversion – dissatisfaction, searching, crisis, peace, joy, change.

**Corporate religious experience is a collective group religious experience. Do they provide external verification?** **In 1981, 6 children had visions of Mary in Bosnia over a number of days and since. Pilgrims have visited subsequently.** **In 1994, The Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship Vineyard Church (called Catch The Fire) experienced The Toronto Blessing. The Holy Spirit was experienced as "holy laughter" or spontaneous uncontrollable laughter, weeping, falling and animal noises.** **In 1917 in Fatima, Portugal, a crowd of over 30,000 gathered in response to visions there would be a miracle. They saw the sun change in the sky.** **In 1995, the Delhi Milk Miracle saw Hindu statues emit milk.**

**Arguments For.** **1.** They have positive effects which a natural explanation cannot explain. St. Paul's life changed in Acts 9. **2.** Many. Not rare. 30% of population said David Hay **3.** Similarities of description that would not be present if people making up accounts. A common core. **4.** Richard Swinburne believes we ought to trust two principles. **The Principle of Credulity** – we accept what appears to be the case unless evidence to the contrary. **The Principle of Testimony** – we believe what others tells us probably happened unless good reason. **5. Omnipotent / omnibenevolent God wants to/can interact.** **6.** Holy Books evidence. **7.** Freud's pupil Carl Jung said we had spirituality in our minds. He called these common mental images archetypes. Believed religion was positive.

**Arguments against religious experience** **1. Different** to ordinary experiences. Private. Not empirical. **The Problem of Other Minds** – we cannot get into people's minds. **2.** Peter Donovan - **just because believer feels certain does not mean they are right.** Thomas Hobbes: *What is the difference in saying God to spoke to a person in a dream and them dreaming God spoke to them.* **3. Experiences interpreted differently by different faiths - conflicting truth claims. Culturally determined. Wittgenstein's duck rabbit picture – perception. RE socially induced.** **4. Physiological explanations: Drink, drugs, tiredness, illness, depression, fasting, dehydration, lack of Vitamin B, lack of sleep all change ways we think/ experience the world.** Mental affected by physical. *Bertrand Russell: People drink too much and see snakes, others fast too much and see God.* **5. Can we follow Swinburne's principles (above)?** In everyday life, we do question people and their testimonies for reliability anyway. Caroline Franks-Davis says religious experience different from everyday experience. Have people grasped the truth? **6. Bertrand Russell said fiction can produce good fruits/lifestyle/people.** **7. Ludwig Feuerbach argued that God was a human invention.** The attributes of God like power, knowledge and goodness are seen in humans. We project and stretch these on to God. We create God in our image. "God is man written in large letters." "Self feeling feeling." **9. Sigmund Freud: Religion was a neurosis caused by childhood insecurities.** It is psychologically attractive for God to exist to forgive our wrong doing and provide hope after death. Religious experiences are hallucinations caused by deep subconscious desires in the same way as our dreams are. Religion is an Obsessive Compulsive Disorder caused by fear, neurosis or desire for a father figure. It is crutch for the weak. Product of tribal society which killed father figure and felt guilty. 3 parts to brain – ego (conscious self), id (repressed memories) and superego morality/religion from upbringing). Religion needs abolished. **10. Biology, neuroscience and physiology questions religious experience.** Dawkins believes religion is a virus of the mind and religion may have existed because useful to our survival. **Newberg and D'Aquili** carried out brain scans on meditating Buddhist monks which show the brain active in meditation. **Michael Persinger's** God Helmet generates a magnetic field around the brain of volunteers who then reported similar feelings to those of religious experiences. **11. There are issues with corporate religious experiences.** Critics point out they may be collective or mass hysteria. A group of people can spontaneously start to generate physical aspects in response to a psychological stimulus. Throughout history this has occurred with illness. Some acts of God in these contexts seem trivial and random. Should they be more useful if God is to communicate? Although these experiences are shared they are really still private. **12. Why does God choose some not others – Particularity. Favouritism.** **13. Re is logically impossible** as God is "wholly other" (Kant). **14. Maurice Wiles – God does not intervene. There is evil. Compromises Free Will.**