

Religious Experience – B – Mystical Experiences



By the end of this lesson you will have:

- Re-capped what you have learnt about the nature of religious experience
 - Understood how James and Otto deconstruct mystical experiences
- Compared and contrasted James' and Otto's views
- Applied these views to different examples of mystical experience

Spec Check

AO1

Mystical Experience

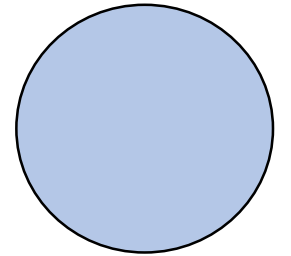
William James' four characteristics of mystical experience: ineffable, noetic, transient and passive

Rudolf Otto – the concept of the numinous; *mysterium tremendum*; the human predisposition for religious experience

- **The adequacy of James' four characteristics in defining mystical experience**
- **The adequacy of Otto's four characteristics in defining mystical experience**

Re-Cap – Word Association - The Nature of Religious Experience

- **Visions**
- **Conversion**
- **Mysticism**
- **Prayer**

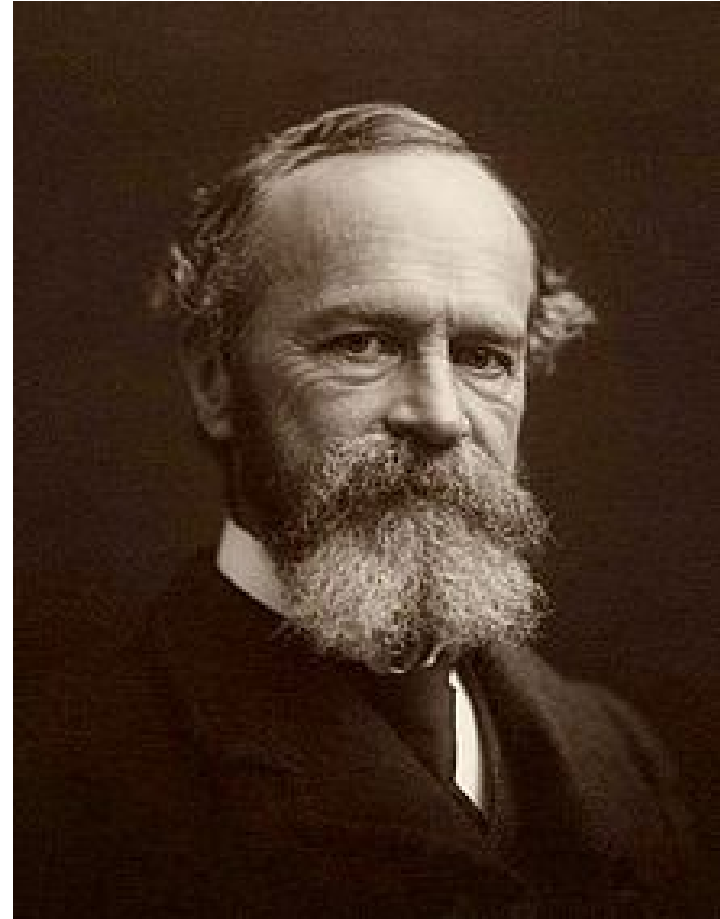


4mins

- SILENTLY and independently – write as many words that you can relate to the types of religious experience above.
- After 2 mins – look at your work to add more if you need

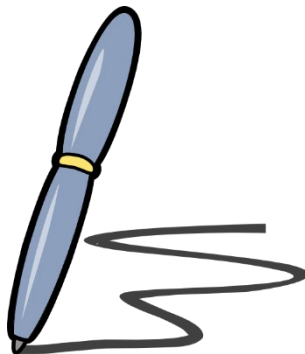
William James

- **19th Cent** philosopher and psychologist
- American background but educated in England
- Used his work in *varieties of religious experience* to present his argument that **human life is characterised by a vast array of personal, cultural, and religious approaches** that cannot and should not be reduced one to the other.
- Sympathetic to a person who undergoes a religious experience but **does not see it as objective truth**



William James

- He concluded that **all mystical experiences tended to fall under 4 categories**, whether they were from different religions or the same.
- He claimed that these categories were
- **Passivity**
- **Ineffability**
- **Noetic Quality**
- **Transiency**
- **TASK:** Read pages 92/93 of the EDUQAS textbook. Independently make brief notes on the four characteristics above.



Classification 1 - Ineffability

- *'The quality must be directly experienced, it cannot be imparted or transferred to others'.* – Musician analogy
- This provides the greatest challenge to the authenticity of the experience
- James states just because it cannot be 'proved' should not detract from its value
- Question: **Which mystics demonstrate this and why?**

Classification 2 - Noetic Quality

- *'Mystical states..are states of insight into depths of truths unplumbed by the discursive intellect'*
- James believed mystics gained a special kind of knowledge.
- This is known as the noesis of the mystic's experience
- Question: **What knowledge did the mystics you have studied gain?**

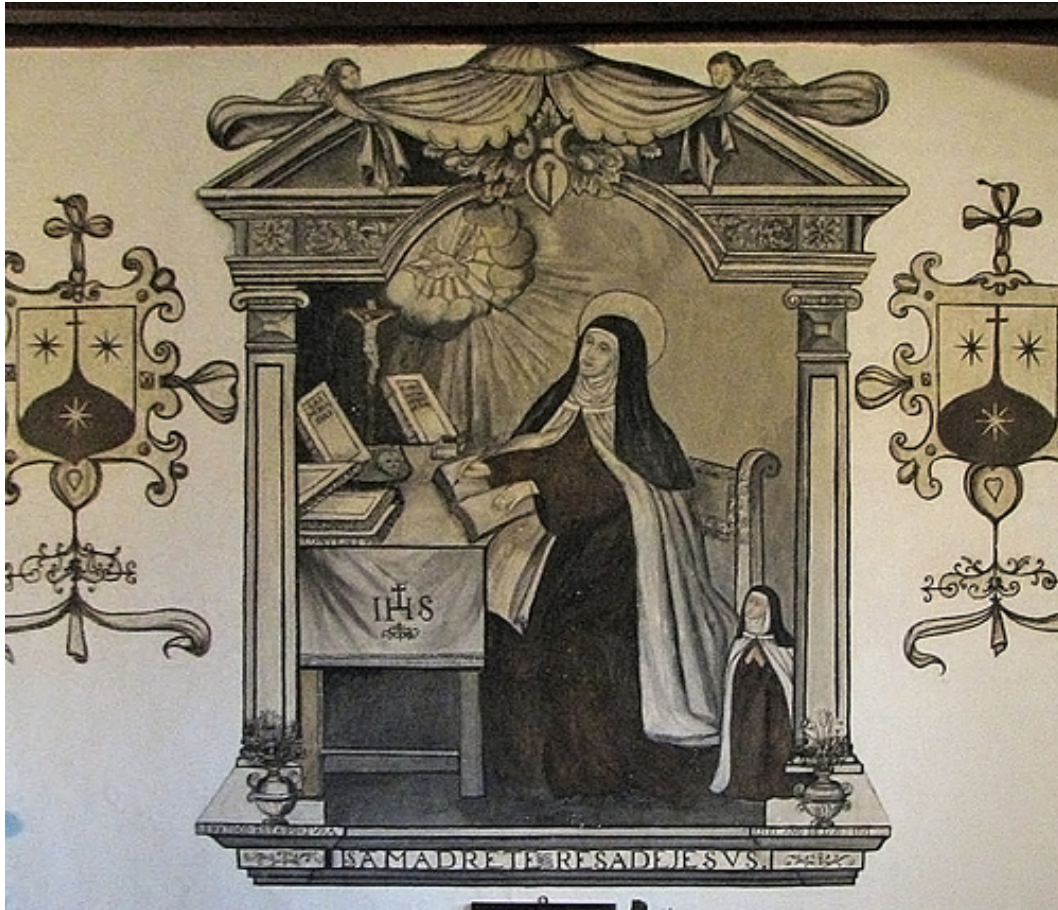
Classification 3 - Transiency

- *'Often, when faded their quality can but imperfectly be reproduced in memory; but when they recur it is recognized'*
- This is the fleeting nature of mystical experiences. They come and go but the effects last a long time.
- Question: **Where can we relate this to mystics we have studied so far?**

Classification 4 - Passivity

- *'The mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were held by a superior power'*
- An important feature – claims that the mystical experience is done to the recipient.
- The recipient's life will very often be changed by the experience.
- Question: **Where can you relate this to mystics that you have studied thus far?**

Example – St Teresa of Avila



- Look at this picture of ST Teresa of Avila
- Label James' 4 characteristics of mystical experience on the picture

Example -Rumi

- A mystic of the Muslim – Sufi debate
- 13th Century
- Thought God could be accessed through music and dancing
- Through the human spirit we know God
- Works are regarded as some of the most important mystical poems ever
- [Sufi mystic dance](#) - Sema



Rudolf Otto

- 20th century German scholar
- Wrote *'The idea of the Holy'*
- Was interested in **the subjective nature of mystical experiences** and **how they make the recipient feel**
- **TASK**: Read page 94 of the textbook and answer the following questions:
- **1. Why does Otto refer to mystical experiences as Numinous rather than Holy?**
- **2. Why does Otto refer to mystical experiences as 'non-rational' as opposed to 'irrational'?**
- **3. What is a numinous experience according to Otto?**
- **4. What Latin phrase does Otto use to sum up the intensity of a mystical experience felt by the recipient?**
- **5. How might St Teresa or Rumi's mystical experiences be seen as 'numinous'?**

Rudolf Otto

- Otto believed there was a **human predisposition for religious and mystical experience**
- For Otto, the fact that recipients have **'numinous'** experiences is evidence of this
- He claimed that **there is a yearning in humans to understand the non-rational world**
- He states that humans **want knowledge** which **goes beyond the empirical world**
- Rudolf Otto – Stretch and Challenge

Example – Jim Carey

- [Jim Carey's mystical experience](#)
- **TASK:** Make notes on the video as you watch it. Deconstruct Carey's mystical experience under James' and Otto's frameworks for understanding mystical experience

William James on Carey	Rudolf Otto on Carey

- **TIP:** you can complete this table for St Teresa or Rumi instead if you would prefer



A02 – The extent to which James' and Otto's definitions are adequate

- In pairs, you will be given James or Otto
- You must evaluate the adequacy of their approaches in defining mystical experiences
- You should start by drawing a table of 'adequate definition / inadequate definition'
- Add your own thoughts first
- Then turn to page 96 or 97 and add anything that you have missed

Evaluation - James

Ways in which James' characteristics ARE adequate

Ways in which James' characteristics AREN'T adequate

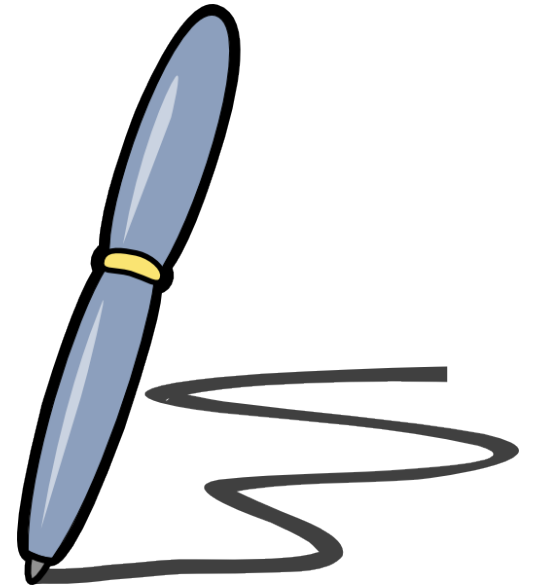
Evaluation - Otto

Ways in which Otto's characteristics ARE adequate

Ways in which Otto's characteristics AREN'T adequate

Consolidation Task

- Complete worksheet 3.B in your workbooks



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