

cultural understanding. This is in line with the core values of the Religious Education Association of the United States and Canada (founded in 1903), with the approach adopted in British religious education syllabuses since about 1975, and with the views of the New Consensus in the United States, as represented by the writings of Warren Nord, Charles Haynes, and others. It seems likely that, over the first quarter of the twenty-first century, practice in religious education in public schools in different Western pluralist liberal democratic societies will gradually converge. However, this may result in individuals increasingly constructing their own personal religious faith, selecting bits from a smorgasbord of different religions—a phenomenon already being observed among some students exposed to a world faiths approach to religious education. It may also dangerously highlight the split between liberal and fundamentalist approaches to religious education.

Secondly, it is clear that religions and faith groups have the right to nurture their own children in their own faith through religious education, though this does not extend to the right to foreclose children's free choice with respect to religion as they grow older. This means that both supplementary schooling and faith schools will continue to have a place in liberal pluralist societies so long as children are not indoctrinated and so long as they are exposed somewhere within their schooling to other religious and nonreligious worldviews.

Thirdly, it is not the place of a pluralist liberal society to promote one religious worldview over another, or to promote religious belief over nonreligious worldviews. This means that the teaching of an established religion through religious education in a multifaith society is no longer justifiable, and the practice is likely to decline gradually, as is the British requirement of a daily act of collective, nondenominational worship in all British state schools. It also raises questions about the continued funding of faith schools in Western states, although there may be justification for partial funding where faith schools provide a general, as well as a religious, education.

SEE ALSO Initiation, overview article; Scholasticism; Yeshivah.

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RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE. The term religious experience has been used in three often overlapping senses in the twentieth century: (1) to refer descriptively to the subjective aspect of a tradition or religion in general; (2) to describe the “common core” of religion in general; and (3) to assert a claim with respect to the source of religious knowledge or certainty. In the first instance, it has competed with the terms piety, devotion, and spirituality. In the second and third instances, it has competed with mysticism.

These usages have been associated with key preoccupations of the modern era. In the first case, where the emphasis is on the subjective experience of the individual, experience has been linked with the rise of individualism and the democratization of religious authority. In the second usage, where the emphasis is on the nature of religion, religious experience has been bound up with the problems of commonality and difference in the context of globalization, colonialism, westernization, and the encounter between traditions. In the third usage, where the focus is on how we know (epistemology), religious experience has been associated with the question of truth in the context of Enlightenment critiques of traditional sources of religious knowledge and social scientific explanations of the origins of religion.

This entry provides a history of the use of the concept of religious experience rather than a history of religious experience per se. The use of the term is discussed under the following headings: (1) the concept of experience and its analogues within various traditions; (2) religious experience in relation to religion in general; and (3) critical approaches to religious experience in recent scholarship.

While there are traditional terms within most, if not all, traditions that have experiential overtones to the modern ear, the way and the extent to which these traditional terms have been brought into modern, comparative discourses has varied. The first section provides an overview of the way in which selected traditions have engaged with modern Euro-American experience-related discourses. The second section highlights three key figures—William James (1842–1910), Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), and Joachim Wach (1889–1955)—each of whom understood religion in general in terms of religious experience, albeit in very different ways.

Disparate theoretical assumptions (philosophical, theological and/or social scientific) led to different understandings of religious experience—both in terms of what counts as religious experience and how it could or should be explained. Depending on the author's underlying theoretical perspective and/or apologetic aims, competing terms, such as enthusiasm, visions, mysticism, spirituality, esotericism, psychical phenomena, and psychopathology, were variously subsumed under, equated with, or distinguished from religious experience. These and other critical issues raised by scholars of religion since the 1970s are discussed in the third section.

EXPERIENCE AND ITS ANALOGUES WITHIN VARIOUS TRADITIONS. Although the use of the Latin term *experientia* in Christian contexts dates back at least to Aquinas, and the use of *experience* in Protestant contexts dates back at least to the seventeenth century, explicit references to religious experience became common in English at the beginning of the nineteenth century and in French (*l'expérience religieuse*) and German (*religiöse Erlebnis, Erfahrung*) toward the end of the nineteenth century. Prior to the late nineteenth century, the use of the term was most common among conversion-oriented Anglo-American Protestants. Over the course of the nineteenth century the English term religious experience was abstracted from its indigenous context within evangelical Protestantism, losing many of its specifically evangelical connotations in the process, and it was recast as a generic term that applied to religion in general. Non-Protestant traditions dealt with this process in various ways. Other terms, such as mysticism and spirituality (indigenous to the Catholic tradition), underwent similar changes during this period and also emerged as comparative terms in the study of religion.

By way of overview, current research suggests the following:

1. Liberal Protestants invested deeply in the concept of experience during the nineteenth century and in the new generic concept of religious experience formalized at the turn of the century by William James. Apart from a few modernists, most of whom were condemned, Catholic theologians dealt with the concepts of experience and religious experience warily if at all in the century and half prior to Vatican II, preferring the indigenous terms mystical and spiritual instead.
2. Universalistic nineteenth-century new religious movements, such as Transcendentalism, Spiritualism, New Thought, and Theosophy utilized experientially related terms (influxes, intuition, revelations, visions, spirits) to understand religion in general, but did not make extensive use of the terms experience or religious experience to refer to these phenomena.
3. Jewish interest in the experiential side of Judaism (Hasidism, Kabbalah) was, for the most part, channeled into discussions of mysticism rather than religious experience. The same seems to hold true for interest in the experiential side of Islam (Sufism).
4. Hindu and Buddhist thinkers more commonly invested

in the concept of experience and a few made the concept of religious experience central to their thought.

PRE-REFORMATION CHRISTIANITY AND TRADITIONAL PROTESTANTISM. Within the history of Christianity, church authorities carefully regulated experientially related forms of belief and practice, beginning with the Montanists. In the *Summa Theologia* (1a 2ae q.112 a.5), Thomas Aquinas discussed the experience (*experientia*) of grace, which he indicated could be known conjecturally by signs of its presence in the believer. However, following Aristotle, he claimed that such knowledge is imperfect, and therefore that the experience of grace could not be known with certainty. This theological understanding undercut individual claims to knowledge based on experience and heightened the authority of the church. Mystical and ascetic theology, as subdisciplines within systematic theology, reflected an orthodox Catholic understanding of experience, while non-orthodox understandings were defined as heretical.

Although Protestant reformers also attempted to regulate experientially related forms of belief and practice, the schismatic tendency inherent in Luther's break with Rome made this more difficult, as Catholic critics did not hesitate to point out. Radical (sectarian) Protestants, especially those who advocated the separation of church and state, often made appeals to experience both in England and the Continent. While Continental Protestants typically made use of related terms, English Puritans made explicit reference to experience and occasionally to spiritual experience by the mid-seventeenth century, generally in reference to claims of direct experiences of inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Proponents of Enlightenment thought, such as John Locke, disputed these claims, redescribed such experiences as enthusiasm, and attempted to account for them in non-religious terms.

From the beginnings of evangelical Protestantism in the transatlantic revivals of the 1730s and 1740s until the present, claims of direct experience of the Holy Spirit or the immediate experience of the presence of God have been asserted by some evangelicals and disputed by others. Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley both defended the idea of a direct experience of the Holy Spirit. Both argued that authentic conversion was accompanied by a "new spiritual sense," which by analogy with the physical senses (cf. John Locke) allowed the believer to apprehend the Spirit directly. References to religious experience were common in the titles of nineteenth century evangelical Protestant memoirs, where the term generally referred to such experiences as conversion, sanctification and/or a call to preach. Methodists typically testified to such experiences in what were known collectively as "experience meetings."

The concept of religious experience underwent a dramatic redefinition within the Anglo-American context over the course of the nineteenth century, largely under the influence of romanticism, the growing interest in other religions, and new universalistic religious movements. Through the early decades of the nineteenth century, Anglo-American

Protestants continued to contrast religious experience, by definition authentic, with enthusiasm and mysticism, both considered false. By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, however, enthusiasm had taken on its more benign modern meaning, while mysticism acquired positive connotations through the writings of the Transcendentalists and widely read Protestant translations of Catholic mystical writers, such as Thomas Upham's *Life of Madame Guyon* (1846).

UNIVERSALISTIC NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS. Universalistic nineteenth-century new religious movements, such as Transcendentalism, Spiritualism, New Thought, and Theosophy, drew upon experientially related terms (influxes, visions, spirits, intuition) to understand religion in general, but did not make extensive use of the terms experience or religious experience to refer to these phenomena. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) contrasted experience, which he understood as the sense experience of materialism, with intuition, ecstasy, and influxes of the Divine into the human soul, which he associated with idealism. Explicitly relying on Immanuel Kant to critique Locke, but also drawing support from Plato, Plotinus, and Emanuel Swedenborg, Emerson argued for the legitimacy of intuition and granted it authority over experience. He viewed enthusiasm and “a tendency toward insanity” as relatively benign concomitants of such divine influxes. Like many romantics with an interest in the perennial wisdom tradition, Emerson viewed all religions as pointing to “a fundamental Unity,” which, in his view, reached its highest expression in Hinduism. Reading texts in translation, he linked the religious writings of the East with the thought of Plato, Plotinus, and others in the West (Emerson, pp. 198–199, 392–393, 638).

Later universalistic movements, such as Spiritualism, New Thought, and Theosophy under Helena Blavatsky and Henry Olcott, utilized terms such as spirit communication (Spiritualism) and intuition (New Thought, Theosophy) to describe the means by which individuals might acquire higher non-sense based forms of knowledge. As universalizing movements, they, like the Transcendentalists, maintained that the means in question informed all religions and, thus, religion in general. In contrast to the Transcendentalists, however, these later movements drew extensively on the popular psychology of animal magnetism, arguing that the mental abilities cultivated by mesmerists, such as trance and clairvoyance, provided the psychological substratum upon which their more developed abilities were based.

The Society for Psychical Research, founded in 1882 to assess such claims scientifically, brought together evidence from the Society's investigations of Spiritualist mediums with the latest clinical research on hysteria, the doubling of personality, and hypnosis (the direct descendent of animal magnetism). Frederick Myers, the Society's leading theoretician, linked these phenomena through his theory of the subconscious, which he and William James understood as the means by which non-sense based knowledge might come to consciousness. Whether such knowledge simply surfaced

from the recesses of the mind or entered in some other way from beyond it was the focus of much of the Society's research.

LIBERAL PROTESTANT THEOLOGY. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), a German Protestant theologian with a Pietist background, is usually credited with initiating the emphasis on the self or subjectivity and, thus, by extension on experience, associated with modern Protestant theology. Through his influence on Rudolf Otto, Schleiermacher also had a major influence on the twentieth-century study of religion. In opposition to Kant's emphasis on religion as morality, Schleiermacher located the essence of religion in the immediate, prereflective intuition and feeling of the infinite (*On Religion*). Later he referred to this essence as “a feeling of absolute dependence” (*Christian Faith*). As Hans-Georg Gadamer noted in *Truth and Method*, Schleiermacher himself did not use the term experience, although his key ideas were transposed into this idiom by later interpreters, such as Wilhelm Dilthey, who used the newly coined term *Erlebnis* in his 1870 biography of Schleiermacher (Gadamer, pp. 60–64).

At the turn of the last century, Schleiermacher's emphasis on immediate intuition and feeling as the basis of religious knowledge—now explicitly framed in terms of experience—enjoyed a revival of interest. The revival was coupled, probably not coincidentally, with a widespread shift in the way scholars understood religion. This shift from the Enlightenment conception of religion as an archaic “survival” to a conception of religion as “power,” subjectively understood, implicitly grounded religion in experience. The British anthropologist, R. R. Marett is usually given credit for initiating this shift with his essay on “Pre-Animistic Religion,” delivered in 1899. But others, such as William James, were also thinking along similar lines at about the same time.

Protestant theologians with an interest in the comparative study of religion, such as Nathan Söderblom, Friedrich Heiler, and Rudolf Otto, played a major role in this shift. Building on the thought of Schleiermacher, Marett, and Söderblom, Otto argued in *The Idea of the Holy* that a felt experience of a numinous presence logically preceded Schleiermacher's “feeling of dependence.” The numinous, he said, evoked feelings of mysterium (wholly otherness), tremendum (dread, awe), and fascination. Otto interpreted mysticism as a subset of the experience of the numinous. He considered religion *sui generis*, that is, something unique that could not be adequately interpreted or explained in other terms, and located it, following Schleiermacher, in an irreducibly religious domain (Otto, pp. 5–41).

Ernst Troeltsch, Otto's colleague on the theological faculty at the University of Marburg, approached the experiential dimension of Christianity historically and sociologically under the rubric of mysticism. In *Social Teachings of the Christian Churches* (1912; English, 1931), he drew an important distinction between mysticism, in the widest sense of the word, which he understood as “the insistence upon a direct

inward and present religious experience" (Troeltsch, II, p. 730), and mysticism as understood more narrowly by the philosophy of religion. His depiction of the latter provides, in effect, a sociological description of the emergence of the "philosophia perennis." While mysticism in the broad sense takes on an "immense variety" of forms within the various traditions, mysticism in the narrower sense may break away from "concrete religion" and "set up a theory of [its] own which takes the place of the concrete religion and of its mythos or doctrine." When this happens, "mysticism realizes that it is an independent religious principle; it sees itself as the real universal heart of all religion, of which the various myth-forms are merely the outer garment. It regards itself as the means of restoring an immediate union with God; it feels independent of all institutional religion" (Troeltsch, II, p. 734).

CATHOLICISM AFTER THE COUNCIL OF TRENT. The idea of experience received little development in the Catholic tradition during the post-Reformation period due to its association with Protestantism and movements that were condemned within Catholicism, such as Jansenism, Quietism, and Modernism. The First Vatican Council (1870) reacted to the nineteenth-century emphasis on experience as a source of religious authority, condemning the idea that "men and women ought to be moved to faith only by each one's internal experience or private inspiration" (*De Fide*, Canon 3). In *Pascendi dominici gregis* (1907), Pius X alleged that Catholic modernists wrongly held to the idea that faith and revelation were rooted in religious sentiment or an intuition of the heart. This reliance on "personal experience," the encyclical explained, caused modernists to "fall into the opinion of Protestants and pseudomystics" (para. 14). Moreover, as the encyclical duly noted, an emphasis on experience undercut the Church's exclusivist claims. Given their logic, the encyclical asked, "[W]ith what right will Modernists deny the truth of an experience affirmed by a follower of Islam? With what right can they claim true experience for Catholics alone?" (para. 14) Catholic modernists did embrace the modern turn to the subject and with it a concomitant emphasis on experience, though not in the monolithic way outlined in *Pascendi*.

In the decades prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), twentieth-century Catholic theologians debated whether Thomism could be reconciled with the modern emphasis on subjectivity. The wary appreciation evident in Catholic historian Ronald Knox's *Enthusiasm* (1950) illustrates Catholic ambivalence toward experience prior to the Second Vatican Council. The concept of experience found renewed, though qualified, acceptance at the Second Vatican Council. Among twentieth-century Catholic theologians, Karl Rahner, S. J., and Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., are particularly known for the emphasis they place on experience.

JUDAISM AND ISLAM. Scholars of Judaism and Islam, for the most part, discussed experientially related phenomena under the rubric of mysticism, understood to include what in

Christian contexts would be distinguished as Gnosticism and esotericism. With the publication of volumes on *Jewish Spirituality* (1988, 1989) and *Islamic Spirituality* (1989, 1991) in the World Spiritualities series, scholars in both traditions adopted spirituality as an encompassing a rubric under which to discuss the subjective aspect of the traditions more broadly.

Two of the most prominent early twentieth-century scholars of Jewish mysticism—Martin Buber (1878–1965) and Gershom Scholem (1897–1982)—were both German Jews who reacted against the Enlightenment rationalism of their era and sought, albeit in different ways, to highlight the non-rational aspects of the Jewish tradition. Buber embraced an ahistorical *Erlebnismystik* early in his career, which Scholem reacted against. Buber's *Ekstatic Confessions* (1909)—a collection of personal accounts from various eastern and western religious traditions—utilized the German distinction between *Erfahrung* (sense experience) and *Erlebnis* (non-sense based experience) to make a case for ecstasy as an undifferentiated experience in which the boundaries between self and other and self and world disappear. This ecstatic experience, he claimed, was common to the Vedas and Upanishads, Midrash and Qabbalah, Plato and Jesus. Although Buber grew increasingly uncomfortable with this formulation as his thought matured, the *Ekstatic Confessions* recalled the spirit of Schleiermacher and prefigured Rudolf Otto's *Idea of the Holy*.

In contrast to Buber, who believed that such ecstatic experiences transcended time and thus had no history, Scholem devoted his life to the historical study of Jewish mysticism and in particular to the Qabbalah. He understood the Qabbalah as a suppressed and esoteric tradition that held the key to the continuing vitality of the tradition as a whole. In his hands, myth, symbol, and mysticism rather than religious experience, provided the conceptual categories for surfacing an alternative history of Judaism and, in the process, a different understanding of mysticism. In the late twentieth century, Moshe Idel highlighted the ecstatic side of Qabbalistic mysticism, overlooked by Scholem, and integrated the study of Hasidic mysticism, pioneered by Buber, into the broader history of Jewish mysticism.

Some of the most prominent twentieth-century scholars of Islamic mysticism—Louis Massignon (1883–1962), Henry Corbin (1907–1978), and Annemarie Schimmel (1922–2003)—were non-Muslims who turned to the study of Islamic mysticism in the context of colonialism. During the eighteenth century, scholars associated with the British East India Company discovered the "Sooffees" and soon thereafter coined the term *Sufism*. During the nineteenth century, western intellectuals viewed Sufism positively as a form of mysticism and distinguished it from Islam, which they viewed negatively. By the late nineteenth century, this view had been racialized on the assumption that any mysticism evident in the Semitic religions was actually of Aryan origin. Massignon, through close philological work on the

writings of a particular Ṣūfī mystic, al-Ḥallāj, challenged this theory, arguing that Ṣūfī mysticism could be traced directly to the Qurʾān. As a Catholic reconverted to Catholicism through his engagement with the martyred Ṣūfī Massignon was studying, the depiction of al-Ḥallāj as a mystic undoubtedly seemed obvious. He viewed al-Ḥallāj, who died at the hands of the community he was trying to save, as recapitulating the mystical substitution of one life for another that lay at the heart of Massignon's Christocentric Catholic devotional life. The work of Massignon's student, Henry Corbin, also provided an eclectic bridge between traditions. Through a reading of Islam that stressed on-going revelation through Ṣūfī and Shīʿah visionaries—something that he could not find in Christianity—Corbin found a means of critiquing Christianity. Given his interest, Corbin used a broader range of terms—prophetic philosophy, esotericism and the visionary tradition—to depict his approach. Annemarie Schimmel, who taught at Harvard for twenty-five years, emphasized the complexity of the origins of Ṣūfī mysticism. In *The Mystical Dimension of Islam*, she resisted the then still common tendency to explain Sufism as the result of contact with other mystical traditions and, like Massignon, pointed to Ṣūfī-like tendencies present in the Qurʾān.

HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM. The concept of experience played a prominent role in the mediation of Hinduism and Zen Buddhism to the West in the twentieth century. In India and Japan, the heightened emphasis on experience reflected a rethinking of the Hindu and Buddhist traditions amidst the crosscurrents of colonialism, westernization, and nationalist self-assertion. Building on the thought of nineteenth-century Neo-Hindu predecessors, such as Rammohun Roy (1772–1833), Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905), and Vivekananda (1863–1902), the Indian scholar Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975) explicitly embraced the concept of religious experience as central to his understanding of religion in general and Hinduism in particular. In Japan, Daisetz Teitaro (D. T.) Suzuki (1870–1966), influenced by the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō and the “New Buddhism” of the Meiji period (1868–1912), emphasized the “inner experience” of enlightenment (*satori*) in Zen, the Buddhist tradition, and religion and philosophy in general. As with Christian modernists of the same era, Hindu and Buddhist “modernizers” used the idea of experience to undercut traditional sources of authority and interpret traditional concepts in new ways.

Roy, whose translations of Hindu texts were read by the American Transcendentalists, opened the question of the authority of Hindu scriptures and raised questions regarding the relation of Hindu revelation to the revelation claimed by other traditions. Tagore pursued these questions much more deeply in an attempt to establish how much of the tradition could be accepted as binding. He broke with the Vedānta philosophy of Śāṅkara, replacing Śāṅkara's commentaries with his own. According to Wilhelm Halbfass, Debendranath transferred authority from the texts themselves to “the pure heart, filled with the light of intuitive knowledge,”

thus placing himself “in the position of a ‘seer’” (Halbfass, p. 223). His reinterpretation of authority was simultaneously influenced by Western conceptions of inspiration and intuition and assertively Hindu. According to Halbfass, Debendranath's

doctrine of intuition and his interpretation of religious texts as documents of inner experience opened up new dimensions of universality and of interaction with other religions, and it paved the way for such exemplary Neo-Hindu views as that of Radhakrishnan, who saw all valid religious documents, both within and without Hinduism, as records of ‘experiences,’ and thus understood ‘intuition’ and ‘experience’ as the basis and the common denominator of all religions (Halbfass, p. 224).

These ideas were promoted in the West in an embodied way through the figure of Ramakrishna—“the most famous representative of ‘living Hinduism’ and . . . the very symbol of the potential of undogmatic religious experience and ecstasy contained within the Hindu tradition” (Halbfass, p. 227). While, according to Halbfass, Ramakrishna himself cannot be counted as a spokesperson for Neo-Hinduism, “he became the instrument and leading figure of Neo-Hinduism in its encounter with Europe” through the tireless promotional efforts of his student, Vivekananda (Halbfass, p. 230).

D. T. Suzuki's earliest publications reflect the New Buddhist orientation of his teacher, the Rinzai Zen abbot Shaku Sōen, as well as the influence Paul Carus, the western Buddhist advocate with whom Suzuki studied from 1897–1909, but they place little explicit emphasis on the concept of experience. In his *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (1907), Suzuki characterized Nirvana in terms of “the suppression of egoism and the awakening of love.” He described the Bodhisattva ideal as one of “all-embracing love” and, like Carus, depicted “this gospel of universal love [as] the consummation of all religious emotions whatever their origin” (Suzuki, pp. 55, 366, 369). Suzuki's turn to experience was apparently prompted by the publication of his friend Nishida Kitarō's *Zen no kenkyū* (An inquiry into the good) in 1911. Kitarō's work, which was influenced by William James, was a rethinking of Japanese philosophy in light of the concept of pure experience (*junsui keiken*). In “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” Robert Sharf indicates that the two Japanese words used to translate experience—*keiken* (for the English experience) and *taiken* (for the German *Erlebnis*)—rarely appeared in pre-modern Japanese texts. By the 1920s, Suzuki was interpreting “the doctrine of Enlightenment” as an “inner experience,” in which “Enlightenment is grasped immediately without any conceptual medium” (*Essays in Religion*, First Series [1926], p. 73). He used this understanding of enlightenment to argue for the centrality of Zen in the Buddhist tradition and to critique those who tried to “grasp the spirit of Buddhism” through the philosophical study of Buddhist teachings rather than by entering into “the inner

essence of Enlightenment [as] experienced by the Buddha" (p. 118).

Enlightenment emerged as Suzuki's primary experiential category. While he was quite open to comparisons, he stressed the difference between the Zen experience and meditation (dhyana) as practiced in India, most theistic forms of Christian mysticism, and "conversion . . . as the term is generally used by Christian converts" (Suzuki, *Essays*, pp. 262–263, 231). At the same time, he viewed "Zen as the ultimate fact of all philosophy and religion." Not only was it "the fountain of Buddhist thought and life," it was "very much alive also in Christianity, Mahommedanism, in Taoism, and even in positivistic Confucianism" (Suzuki, p. 268). With a few exceptions, such as his discussion of Eckhart and Zen in *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (1957), Suzuki stayed with the Japanese concept of satori. While he was willing to translate satori as Enlightenment, interpret it as the "Zen experience," and recognize it in other traditions, he rarely subsumed it under other rubrics, in effect promoting it as a competitor to mysticism and religious experience in the market place of ideas.

USE IN RELATION TO RELIGION IN GENERAL. William James (1842–1910), Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), and Joachim Wach (1889–1955), each of whom understood religion in general in terms of religious experience, illustrate three different understandings of the concept—empirical (James), perennial (Radhakrishnan), and phenomenological (Wach)—each with its own intellectual antecedents. James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) marks the transformation of traditional evangelical Protestant understanding of religious experience in the Anglo-American context under the influence of experimental psychology, including psychical research, and new religious movements such as Transcendentalism, Swedenborgianism, Spiritualism, and Theosophy. Radhakrishnan, in writings that date back to the 1920s, highlights the Neo-Hindu transformation of traditional Hindu concepts of *darśana* and *anubhava* in the colonial Indian context under the influence of the East-West exchange, Christian missions, and the rise of Hindu nationalism. Wach represents the explicit codification of the German intellectual tradition represented by Schleiermacher and Otto under the rubric of religious experience within the context of the academic study of religion (the History of Religions) beginning in the 1940s.

WILLIAM JAMES. William James, a philosopher and psychologist who taught at Harvard for over thirty years, is usually given credit for constituting the term religious experience as a technical term in the study of religion. In *Varieties*, religious experience, abstracted from its traditional Protestant meaning, served as an umbrella term that encompassed traditionally Catholic conceptions of sainthood and mysticism as well as the traditionally Protestant idea of conversion. References to other traditions, while not as numerous, appeared throughout the book as well. All were united under the rubric of religious experience, which no longer referred to the

understanding of experience that a particular (evangelical Protestant) tradition deemed normative, but to an aspect of religion in general.

James delivered the Gifford Lectures, soon thereafter published as *Varieties*, in Edinburgh in 1901. He defined religion for the purpose of his lectures (that is, heuristically) as "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 divine" (James, p. 34). He stressed that for religious persons "[i]t is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call 'something there,' more deep and more general than any of the special and particularly 'senses'" (James, p. 55). Utilizing autobiographies and memoirs as data, James focused on what he referred to as first hand experience, that is, on "the original experiences that were the pattern-setters," rather than in the experiences of "ordinary believers." Under the influence of nineteenth-century romanticism, James was particularly interested in "geniuses" in the religious line." Such persons, he recognized, were frequently subject to extremes of experience; they heard voices, had visions, and fell into trance. James, like Emerson before him, readily conceded that religious geniuses were often depicted as psychopathological in his own day and as "enthusiasts" in earlier times. Nonetheless, James, in contrast to many later psychologists of religion, was convinced that, empirically speaking, the more extreme cases would shed the greatest light on religious experience as a whole.

Although religious experience and mysticism were both viewed positively and much discussed at the turn of the century, the boundary between them was not clearly demarcated. While, according to James, "personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness," mysticism was not simply a subset of religious experience. There were, in his view, both religious experiences that were not mystical and mystical experiences—such as dreamy states and alcohol and drug induced experiences—that were not religious. At the end of his discussion of mysticism, he conceded that "religious mysticism" actually makes up "only one half of mysticism." The other half, he said, has no traditions other than what "the text-books on insanity supply" (James, p. 337).

Those with a particular interest in mysticism often have read James's chapter on the subject in isolation from the work as a whole, either adopting or critiquing his "four marks" of mysticism—ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity—and linking him with the tradition descended from Schleiermacher. Recent critics of ahistorical approaches to mysticism, such as Grace Jantzen, have critiqued James on the basis of this sort of reading. While there are resemblances between Schleiermacher, Otto, and James, particularly in terms of their emphasis on emotion, the differences are significant. Troeltsch noted in 1912 that the key difference between James and the European philosophers of

religion lay in the latter's commitment to Platonic or Neoplatonic rationalism and the former's commitment to an anti-Platonic radical empiricism. While the Europeans presupposed an "a priori unity of consciousness" upon which they could base a postulated "essence of religion," James did not. James did not consider religion an a priori category and, while he assumed that it had a distinct function that could be identified by means of comparisons with similar phenomena, it was not, in his view, *sui generis*.

At most points in *Varieties*, James as a result made a clear distinction between the subjective experience of believers (i.e., their phenomenological claims of immediacy), which he recognized, and the truth claims they asserted (i.e., their epistemological claims to immediacy), which were, in his view, open to question. He recognized, for example, that "any object that is infinitely important to us and awakens our devotion feels to us also as if it must be *sui generis* and unique." Even a crab, he added tongue in cheek, would undoubtedly be filled with "a sense of personal outrage" if it overheard us class it with the crustaceans "and thus dispose of it" (James, p. 17). In contrast to Otto, who made analogies—particularly between religious and aesthetic experience—in order to evoke the "perfectly *sui generis*" experience of the numinous in his readers, James was an inveterate comparativist who liked nothing better than to construct a graduated series of examples—religious and non-religious—so as to more fully grasp the significance of the phenomena in question.

Also in contrast to Otto, James was interested in mediating between science and religion and did not reject naturalistic explanations of religious claims out of hand. Where Otto seemed to assume the objective reality of the numinous object, James asked whether the seemingly external presence encountered by believers—the "More" as he called it—really existed. James offered the idea of the "subconscious" developed by Frederick Myers, his colleague in the Society for Psychical Research, as a largely naturalistic explanation of such experiences, which nonetheless held open the possibility of influences that originated beyond the self. James himself believed that such influences were possible, as he indicated in his postscript, and he was closely involved with the Society for Psychical Research's attempts to obtain evidence of life after death through their investigations of spiritualist mediums.

SARVEPELLI RADHAKRISHNAN. Radhakrishnan was born near Madras, India, and educated in schools run by Christian missionaries. The missionaries' criticisms of Hinduism led him to examine it for himself and ultimately to take up the Neo-Hindu efforts to modernize the tradition. From 1909 to 1931, he taught philosophy and religion at various colleges and universities in India. Beginning in the mid-1920s, he gave a series of prestigious lectures in England and the United States and, from 1936–39, held the Spalding Chair in Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford. Upon his return to India, he assumed a variety of high-ranking administrative

and political posts, including from 1962–67, the presidency of India.

Radhakrishnan's perennialist understanding of religious experience blended a distinctly Neo-Hindu form of Vedanta with the philosophical idealism of the West. In a lecture on "Religious Experience" given at Oxford in 1926 (and later published in *A Hindu View of Life* [1927]), he located Hinduism's particular strength in its long history of "welding together heterogeneous elements and enabling them to live together in peace and order." In a world "full of racial, cultural, and religious misunderstandings," he hoped that the Hindu approach to "the problem of religious conflicts" might have lessons for all. Hinduism was able to discover unity amidst diversity because of its grounding in religious experience. Reflecting his debt to Tagore, he wrote that in Hinduism "intellect is subordinated to intuition, dogma to experience, outer expression to inward realization. Religion is not the acceptance of academic abstractions or the celebration of ceremonies, but a kind of life or experience. It is insight into the nature of reality (*darśana*), or experience of reality (*anubhava*)" (Radhakrishnan, p. 15).

As McDermott points out, both Vedanta and idealism share an epistemology (a theory of intuition) and a metaphysics (a theory of the Absolute) in which the case for intuition presupposes the reality of the Absolute and case for the Absolute depends on knowledge supplied by intuition (Radhakrishnan, p. 16). Radhakrishnan equates "religious experience" and intuitive knowledge. In *An Idealist View of Life*, he described religious experience as "a type of experience which is not clearly differentiated into a subject-object state, an integral, undivided consciousness in which not merely this or that side of man's nature but his whole being seems to find itself." (Radhakrishnan, 1932, p. 91). He made use of the idea of the unconscious to explain how the Absolute could be "directly experienced" without making a claim for "pure experience." Thus, he argued:

immediacy does not mean absence of psychological mediation but only non-mediation by conscious thought. Ideas which seem to come to us with compelling force, without any mediate intellectual process of which we are aware, are generally the results of previous training in traditions imparted to us in our early years. . . . Something is directly experienced, but it is unconsciously interpreted in the terms of the tradition in which the individual is trained (Radhakrishnan, 1932, pp. 98–99).

Thus, as he summed up in *The Hindu View of Life*:

religious experience is not the pure unvarnished presentment of the real in itself, but is the presentment of the real already influenced by the ideas and prepossessions of the perceiving mind. . . . Each religious genius spells out the mystery of God according to his own endowment, personal, racial, and historical. The variety of the pictures of God is easily intelligible when we realize that religious experience is psychologically mediated (Radhakrishnan, pp. 24–25).

JOACHIM WACH. Wach, a German-born historian of religions, studied with Otto, Heiler, and Troeltsch. He taught at the University of Leipzig until his appointment was terminated in 1935 due to his family's Jewish background. He immigrated to the United States, where he taught at Brown University (1935–45) and the University of Chicago (1946–1955). In his best known work, *The Sociology of Religion*, Wach synthesized the phenomenological method as pioneered by Otto, Max Scheler, and Gerardus van der Leeuw with the sociological approach of Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch. Relying on Otto, Wach began with religious experience, which he defined as the “experience of the holy.” Following the lead of Weber and Troeltsch, Wach focused on the expression of religious experience in the contexts of theory (myth and doctrine), cultus (worship), and, above all, social groups and social relations. By focusing on the interplay between religion and society, Wach hoped to illustrate not only “the cultural significance of religion but also to gain new insight into the relations between the various forms of expression of religious experience and eventually to understand better the various aspects of religious experience itself” (Wach, 1944, p. 5).

In contrast to James who compared religious and non-religious phenomena and distinguished between such phenomena pragmatically, Wach limited his comparisons to religious experiences, which he held to have an “objective character” that would “ultimately defy any attempt to describe, analyze, and comprehend its meaning scientifically” (Wach, 1944, p. 14). In the wake of the Second World War, perhaps in reaction to Nazism, Wach provided what were, in effect, theological criteria for distinguishing between genuine (i.e., objective) and pseudo-religious experience. While “pseudo religions,” such as Marxism, ethnic or racialized religions, and nationalism, in his view, were grounded in finite (i.e., human and subjective) realities, genuine religious experience was, he claimed, grounded in “ultimate reality” (Wach, 1951, pp. 32–33). Wach's stress on the *sui generis* nature of religion and the objective character of ultimate reality, which he shared with Otto and van der Leeuw, remained characteristic features of the history of religions program at the University of Chicago under Wach's successor, Mircea Eliade (1907–1986).

Eliade, in the eyes of many the dominant figure in the study of religion for the post-war generation, approached the study of religion in light of the distinction between the sacred and the profane rather than religious experience per se. He explicitly linked his understanding of the hierophany, the manifestation of the sacred in the profane, to the Christian ideas of incarnation and sacrament. In *Patterns of Comparative Religion*, he emphasized the idea that “the sacred is always manifested through some thing” (Eliade, p. 26). These things included the natural and built environment (sun, moon, rocks, water; temples); plants, animals, and humans; biological processes (sex and fertility); human activities (agriculture, hunting); and immaterial objects, such as time, sym-

bols, moral laws, and ideas. Indeed, he stressed that there was probably not “anything . . . that has not at some time in human history been somewhere transformed into a hierophany” (Eliade, p. 11). Given his sharp distinction between the sacred and profane, the hierophany represented a “paradoxical coming-together of sacred and profane.” Acknowledging the Christian overtones of this formulation, he indicated that “one might even say that all hierophanies are simply prefigurations of the miracle of the Incarnation, that every hierophany is an abortive attempt to reveal the mystery of the coming together of God and man” (Eliade, p. 29).

While anything could potentially manifest the sacred, Eliade also insisted that “a hierophany [nonetheless] implies a choice, a clear-cut separation of this thing which manifests the sacred from everything else around it” (Eliade, p. 13). Sometimes Eliade depicted this act of separation as the result of human choice, and at other times, the result of sacred action. Thus, Eliade acknowledged that humans as historical actors experience, interpret, and revalue the sacred, while, at the same time, insisting that the sacred as suprahistorical agent ultimately reveals, displays, and thus imposes “itself on man from without” (Eliade, p. 369). The conflation of the two perspectives into one “onto-theological system”—to borrow Jonathan Z. Smith's phrase—has been both a source of confusion and the subject of critique in subsequent decades.

Although Eliade did not use the term religious experience in a technical sense, he often used it as a synonym for the experience of the sacred, broadly conceived to include not only hierophanies, but also kratophanies (manifestations of power), totemism, ancestor worship, etc. He stressed that “elementary hierophanies” were always part of a larger religious system made up of “all the religious experiences of the tribe,” on the one hand, and “a corpus of traditional theories [e.g. myths] which cannot be reduced to elementary hierophanies,” on the other (Eliade, p. 30). In so far as it functioned as an extension of his concept of the sacred, Eliade's understanding of religious experience maintained the *sui generis* and objective character evident in the lineage from Otto to Wach.

Eliade's colleagues and heirs at the University of Chicago appropriated and critiqued his legacy in various ways. Eliade's seemingly casual subsumption of the sacred under the heading of religious experience was subsequently reinforced by Eliade's colleagues, Charles Long and Joseph Kitagawa, both of whom studied under Joachim Wach and maintained Wach's preference for the term religious experience. Kitagawa, reflecting the influence of Otto on Wach and Eliade, used the term as a catchall for the “unique and irreducible element” of religion (Kitagawa, 1987, p. 28). In essays dating back to the late sixties, Long undercut Eliade's ontological claims by stressing the role of human imagination in the apprehension of the sacred (Long, 1986, pp. 23–25, 27–53, 65–78). Jonathan Z. Smith explicitly criticized Eliade's conflation of the morphological and onto-

logical and argued for the importance of separating the two in order to maintain the integrity of the morphological enterprise in the context of historical analysis (Smith, 2000, p. 346; see also 1978, pp. 88–103, 253–259, 289–310). In *The Symbolism of Evil*, philosopher Paul Ricoeur critiqued Eliade's understanding of symbols, rooting them more deeply in psychological and cultural experience, by arguing, first, that "to manifest the 'sacred' on the 'cosmos' and to manifest it in the 'psyche' are the same thing" and, second, that scholarly engagement with symbols is shaped both by scholars' own situatedness and by the situatedness of the questions they ask (Ricoeur, pp. 12–13, 19–20).

MYSTICISM, THE NUMINOUS, AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE. James understood mysticism and religious experience as overlapping but not coextensive. Radhakrishnan used the term religious experience to refer to what many others would call mysticism. Otto, van der Leeuw, Wach, and Eliade subsumed mysticism under their rubric of choice (the holy, power, religious experience, or the sacred respectively). Wach, Eliade, Kitagawa, and Long, all of whom were interested in the study of religion in general, viewed terms such as religious experience, the sacred, and the holy in relation to a wide range of material and non-material phenomena that were not necessarily associated with the term mysticism. Presumably, they viewed it as a more adequate basis for the study of religion in all its concrete manifestations.

Scholars of mysticism did not demonstrate the same interest in the study of religion in general as did historians of religion. Many were identified primarily as philosophers of religion and brought epistemological concerns to the study of mysticism. During the fifties and sixties, their discussions revolved mostly around matters of definition and boundaries in the study of mysticism. Thus, for example, R. C. Zaehner, who assumed the Spalding Chair in Eastern Religion and Ethics at Oxford upon Radhakrishnan's departure, critiqued both his predecessor's perennialism and that of Aldous Huxley, countering with a more nuanced characterization of mysticism that ruled out psychic and physical phenomena, downplayed the value of drug-induced experiences, and heightened the differences between traditions in a manner congruent with his own Catholic commitments. In *Mysticism and Philosophy*, Walter T. Stace reiterated the consensus view that visions, voices, raptures, trances and "hyperemotionalism" were not part of the "universal core" of mystical experience and sharply differentiated "mystical experience" from "religious experience," arguing that once mystical experience is stripped of "all intellectual interpretation" all that is left is "the undifferentiated unity." What, he asked, "is there that is religious about an undifferentiated unity?" (Stace, p. 23).

The British historian of religions, Ninian Smart (1927–2001), made the most significant attempt to bring discussions of mysticism into the general study of religion during this period. In *Reason and Faiths*, he proposed to move beyond Otto by arguing that the numinous and the mystical

represented two different forms of religious experience. He associated the former, with its emphasis on an encounter with the "wholly other," with the monotheistic religions of the West and the latter, with its emphasis on union with the one, with the religions of the East. He used this distinction to structure his influential textbook on world religions, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, which was reissued in five editions over the succeeding three decades.

THE CRITICS. Because, to paraphrase William James, the use of a concept can be better understood in relation to its near neighbors and closest competitors, this section gives some consideration to critical debates over the concept of mysticism alongside debates over the concept of religious experience. Other competitors, especially "enthusiasm," "the sacred," and "spirituality," could profitably be compared as well. Mysticism, however, was selected for examination because of its prominence as an alternative during most of the period under consideration in this essay. Significant criticism of the underlying assumptions that informed the use of the terms religious experience and mysticism surfaced in the 1970s and gathered momentum over the next two decades. The central question with respect to religious experience (and by extension religion) was whether or not it was *sui generis*. This question was typically debated in relation to the issue of "reductionism" in the study of religion, that is, the question of whether religion (or religious experience) could be legitimately redescribed in nonreligious terms. The central question with respect to mysticism was whether or not it had a "common core" that united all the disparate forms of mystical experience. This question was typically debated in relation to questions about the nature of experience, specifically the relationship between experience and language.

Both debates were, in a sense, about the autonomy of the experiences in question. The debate over whether or not mysticism had a common core located the question of autonomy in relation to the traditions. Those who argued for a common core, a view typically connected to the *philosophia perennis*, were in effect arguing for a common esoteric tradition that united the various traditions. The debate over whether or not religious experience was *sui generis* located the question of autonomy in relation to the academic disciplines. Those who argued for the *sui generis* nature of religious experience resisted the idea that religion could be adequately understood in nonreligious (i.e. psychological, sociological, historical) terms. The underlying issue was whether or not the phenomenological approach to the study of religion, which made a sharp distinction—loosely following Dilthey and other Continental philosophers—between methods appropriate to the humanities and methods appropriate to the sciences, was adequate for the study of religion or just another way of importing religion itself into the academy.

In its most recent iteration, the debate has turned to the relationship between scholars of religion and what they study. Methodological questions surrounding the selection

of data, the nature of comparison, and the influence of the scholar's beliefs and life experiences remain central in a context where some scholars are calling for methods that more effectively distinguish between the voices and agendas of scholars and those of their subjects. The underlying issue has to do with the extent to which scholars construct the object of study and the bearing that role in constructing the object has on the subject.

DEBATES OVER THE NATURE OF RELIGION. The 1970s and early 1980s were a period of rising discontent among scholars interested in the study of religion and the study of mysticism. In both cases discontent focused on critiques of the giants that had dominated these areas of study. In the study of religion, criticism focused above all on Mircea Eliade. Robert Segal's provocative essay "In Defense of Reductionism" directed much of the critical energy. At issue was what Eliade meant by claiming that the "sacred" was "irreducible." Did he mean that the sacred was real for believers and, thus, should not be interpreted in any other terms, or was he claiming that the believers' perspective was in fact epistemologically true? While acknowledging that Eliade's statements were inconsistent in this regard, Segal concluded that Eliade's "willingness to exceed and even violate believers' particular conscious views of the meaning of religion for them suggests that he is concerned with more than its truth for them" (Segal, 101). Segal also made the point, which was shortly thereafter reiterated and generalized by Wayne Proudfoot, that there is no necessary conflict between the humanists' desire to describe the conscious meaning of religion for believers, and the social scientists desire to account for the believer's understanding in terms other than the believer's own.

Building on the different conceptions of interpretation in the hermeneutic and pragmatic traditions, Proudfoot made an important and widely accepted distinction between descriptive and explanatory reduction in *Religious Experience*. "Descriptive reduction," according to Proudfoot, "is the failure to identify an emotion, practice, or experience under the description by which the subject identifies it." The subject's self-description, he maintained, is normative for describing the experience, but should not prevent scholars from offering their own explanations of the phenomena in question in terms that "are not those of the subject and that might not meet with his approval." This sort of "explanatory reduction," Proudfoot argued, is "perfectly justifiable and is, in fact, normal procedure" (Proudfoot, pp.194–197).

Two volumes edited by Thomas A. Idinopulos and Edward Yonan, *Religion and Reductionism* and *The Sacred and its Scholars* capture much of the flavor of the subsequent debate. Two points are worth emphasizing in relation to the first volume. First, Proudfoot's distinction between descriptive and explanatory reduction was widely accepted. While accepting Proudfoot's distinction, both Segal and Donald Wiebe, another well-known critic of Eliade, emphasized that avoiding descriptive reduction did not mean accepting the

tacit explanations of experiences embedded in the descriptive accounts of believers (Idinopulos/Yonan, p. 123). Second, as Ivan Strenski's discussion made clear, reduction involves the redescription of phenomena. "In its home context in the natural sciences and philosophy of science, 'reduction' names a process by which concepts and theories from one domain change by being logically and/or conceptually subsumed by—'reduced to'—those of another. . . . 'Reductionism' is thus the obverse of the view that theories are a priori 'autonomous' and immune to the subsumption by other theories" (Idinopulos/Yonan, p. 97). Although "reduction" is a technical term, it does not refer to a process that is limited to scientists or scholars. As Strenski (Idinopulos/Yonan, p. 102) and Merkur (Idinopulos/Yonan, p. 221) both point out, ordinary believers routinely redescribe the beliefs of those they disagree with.

Several of the essays in *The Sacred and Its Scholars* wrestled with the question of whether Otto, van der Leeuw, Wach, and Eliade were making descriptive claims about the experience of believers or metaphysical claims about religion when they argued that religion is *sui generis*. Merkur argued that Otto was making a descriptive claim, but that van der Leeuw, Wach, and Eliade were not. Idinopulos disagreed with Merkur, claiming that Otto is hopelessly obscure on precisely this point. In a two-part article commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the first edition of Eliade's *Patterns in Comparative Religions*, Jonathan Z. Smith advanced this discussion by distinguishing between morphological (i.e., synchronic) and diachronic approaches to history, on the one hand, and ontological claims to transcend history, on the other. Smith argued that *Patterns* reflects Eliade's "persistent attempt to conjoin [a] morphological understanding of history with an ontology that rejects the historical" (Smith, 2000, p. 346). As indicated above, Smith argues for the importance of separating the morphological and ontological in order to uphold the value of synchronic as well as diachronic analyses in the historical enterprise.

DEBATES OVER THE NATURE OF EXPERIENCE. In the study of mysticism, the critical assault began with a symposium organized by Steven T. Katz in the mid-1970s. In *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, Katz set out to advance the discussion and analysis of mysticism "beyond James and Otto, Stace and Zaehner" (Katz, p. 3). Katz framed his symposia and the volumes that emerged from them in relation to the question of experience and interpretation. Katz and most of the contributors to his edited volumes are considered specialists in the history of mysticism within particular traditions. Most followed Katz's lead in arguing that there is no such thing as a pure unmediated experience and, thus, that the idea that all mystical experiences share a "common core" is false. Robert K. C. Forman emerged as Katz's most prominent critic. In *The Problem of Pure Consciousness* and subsequent works, Forman, building on Stace, narrowed the proposed common core to the "Pure Consciousness Event (PCE)," which he defined "as a wakeful though contentless" form of consciousness (Forman, pp. 7–8).

Forman also reframed the debate between himself and Katz, describing Katz as a “constructivist” and himself as a “perennialist” in their approaches to mysticism. The constructivist model, Forman argued, reflected the desire to privilege pluralism and difference over the commonalities highlighted by perennialists. Viewed in this way, the debate between Katz and Forman can be understood as a debate over the autonomy of mystical experience relative to the traditions. Conversely, it is a debate over the legitimacy of the perennialist self-understanding, which, as predicted by Troeltsch, has broken increasingly free of the traditions over the course of the twentieth century. While perennialists may indeed pluck experiences out of their original socio-historical environment, as the historians of mysticism claimed, they do so in order to relocate, that is subsume, them within a perennialist framework. They are engaging, in other words, in a process of redescription that is not always openly acknowledged.

Both the Katz-Forman debate and the debate over reductionism in the study of religion focused on the autonomy of the experiences in question. The debate between Katz and Forman located the question of autonomy in relation to the traditions. Forman, in arguing for a common core, a view that he explicitly linked to perennialism, argued for the academic legitimacy of a perennialist framework undergirding and implicitly linking the various traditions. The debate over whether or not religious experience (religion) was *sui generis*, in contrast, located the question of autonomy in relation to the academic disciplines. The debate over whether Otto, van der Leeuw, Wach, and Eliade were making descriptive claims about believers or ontological claims about religion in general reflects a parallel uncertainty. Were Otto, van der Leeuw, Wach, and Eliade involved in the empirical study of the religion of their subjects or in creating a generic understanding of religion ontologically grounded in an ostensible experience of the holy or sacred and, thus, tacitly protected from methodological scrutiny? The weight of the scholarship suggests that while they hoped to accomplish the former, they in fact effected the latter, without effectively differentiating between the two aims. Like the perennialists, they too were engaging in an ontologically informed process of redescription that was not overtly acknowledged.

QUESTIONS OF METHOD. The central methodological question for the empirical study of religion is data selection. Douglas Allen clearly articulated the problem when he observed apropos of Eliade that if the historian of religion’s “point of departure is the historical data which expresses the religious experiences of mankind[,] . . . how does one know what documents to collect, which phenomena to describe and interpret?” (Allen, pp. 171-172). Proudfoot identified two options: an experience can be designated as religious by the scholar (who must then supply a definition of religion) or by the subject of the experience. In practice, however, matters are not so simple. Many texts that the scholar might intuitively want to consider were written by followers or observers rather than by the ostensible subject of the experience.

More crucially, many of those same texts do not explicitly refer to either “religion” or “experience.” Moreover, when scholars turn to definitions of religion for assistance, they often find that they employ referents (e.g., ultimate reality, the sacred, the numinous) that are so vague that they offer little assistance in selecting texts. The problem of data selection, thus, leads directly to the underlying question of how (and to what extent) we as scholars constitute our objects of study.

If, as Jonathan Z. Smith has argued, we want to move beyond simply paraphrasing the words of those we are studying, whether on the grounds of their uniqueness or inviolability, we must take responsibility for our role in constructing an object of study. Three options are particularly pertinent with regard to what has traditionally been construed as religious experience, each with its own advantages and disadvantages, depending on the scholar’s aims. (1) The scholar can limit him or herself to texts that make explicit use of the term “religious experience” and its near neighbors and competitors, always taking care to note which terms are actually being employed. This is the strategy adopted by Halbfass, Sharf (1995), and this entry. This approach is particularly useful for tracing the use of concepts and the history of ideas. It does not attempt to get at experiences *per se*. (2) The scholar can decide in advance what he or she will count (i.e. define) as “religious experience” by developing a definition that is sufficiently specific that it can actually be used to select appropriate textual sources for consideration. While this approach allows the scholar to get at experiences, it runs the risk of saying more about the scholar’s understanding of religion (substantively or heuristically) than that of his or her subjects. Care, therefore, should be taken to distinguish between the scholar’s views and those of his or her sources. (3) The scholar can identify an aspect of experience that is not necessarily co-extensive with what scholars or their subjects take to be religion (e.g., the subjective sense of encountering or being moved by an external power), and analyze the way in which it is understood by persons who stand inside and, if desired, outside one or more traditions. This approach allows scholars to analyze what their subjects understand as authentic experience and to explore the criteria they use for making these judgments. This approach makes controversies over the meaning of a particular type of experience the focus of scholarly analysis. It recognizes (and takes advantage of) the fact that both insiders and outsiders to a tradition regularly describe and redescribe experiences as religious or not religious, authentic or inauthentic. In so doing, this approach allows scholars to recognize and examine boundary issues (e.g. between psychical experience, visions, mysticism, religious experience, spirituality and so on) that may be suppressed by scholarly definitions of religion.

NEW DIRECTIONS. Some of the most interesting new research reflects the interdisciplinary interests of William James and others affiliated with the Society for Psychical Research at the beginning of the twentieth century. Three partially overlapping areas of research look particularly promis-

ing: the relationship between religious experience and brain function, between religious experience and psychopathology, and between religious experience and various disciplines or practices. These investigations locate the study of religious experience in relation to cognitive science, clinical psychology, and ritual studies, respectively. Three studies, each of which explores this interdisciplinary terrain in different ways, illustrate three different ways of constructing an object of study.

Etzel Cardeña, Steven Jay Lynn, and Stanley Krippner—all associated with the American Psychological Association's Division 30 (Psychological Hypnosis)—edited *Varieties of Anomalous Experience*. In addition to alluding to James in their title, they view themselves as continuing a tradition of scientific investigation initiated by the Society for Psychical Research and late nineteenth-century clinical researchers. Their object of study is "anomalous experiences," that is, experiences that are either uncommon or are "believed to deviate from ordinary experience or from the usually accepted explanations of reality" (Cardeña/Lynn/Krippner, p. 4). By choosing a term that does not have any necessary associations with either psychopathology or religion, they are free to explore how anomalous experiences relate to either or both in essays on topics such as hallucinatory experiences, synesthesia, lucid dreaming, out-of-body experiences, past-life experiences, and near-death experiences.

Jess Byron Hollenbeck's *Mysticism: Experience, Response, and Empowerment* breaks into the Katz-Forman debate by refusing to exile "visions, locutions, and illuminations from the domain of mysticism," because, he says, in doing so, "we lose sight of a number of fascinating questions that pertain to the psychology of trance." Like James, Hollenbeck takes as his object of study phenomena that fall along a continuum of experience from the more abstract forms of experience typically designated as mystical to "more 'concrete' types of transcendence," such as visions, apparitions, supernormal enhancements of the senses, and experiences of supersensible illumination. These more concrete forms of experience in turn bear some resemblance to everyday sense experience. Reestablishing a continuum of experience allows Hollenbeck to break down the dichotomy between "universal" and "tribal" religions presupposed by the usual definitions of mysticism. He explores the linkages between paranormal experiences, mystical states of consciousness, and practices of recollection (or concentration of the mind) and critiques both the perennialist and contextualist lines of interpretation.

Finally, Ilkka Pyysiäinen's *How Religion Works: Toward a Cognitive Science of Religion* provides a new theory of religious experience based on an object of study that distinguishes between religion and experience and defines religion empirically. Building on the work Pascal Boyer and others, Pyysiäinen hypothesizes that people identify something as "religious" if it involves "counter-intuitive agents," that is, agents that "'violate panhuman intuitive expectations' in a

well defined fashion" (Pyysiäinen, p. 23). In contrast to scholars who simply stipulate a definition of religion, Pyysiäinen's definition is offered as a hypothesis, which he has tested empirically and which is, thus, potentially open to refutation (Pyysiäinen, p. 225). In discussing the neurological mechanisms associated with what are commonly understood as "religious experiences," he stresses that the mechanisms themselves are "in no way specifically 'religious'" (Pyysiäinen, p. 142). The experiences, in other words, are not necessarily either religious or non-religious; they become religious when they are associated with counter-intuitive representations. By carefully distinguishing between religion and experience, Pyysiäinen constructs a theory in which both aspects—the definition of religion and the correlations between experiences and brain processes—are open to experimental testing and potential refutation.

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Overview. This is the first attempt at an overall history of the use of the term religious experience in the modern period. Previous entries on the topic were written from the perspective of the philosophy and/or theology of religion (see Hughes, Hill, Martin, Smith). Two recent efforts provide critical, albeit largely ahistorical, attempts at deconstruction (Sharf 1998; Fitzgerald). The approach taken here was suggested by Cupitt; Halbfass, "The Concept of Experience in the Encounter between India and the West" in Halbfass; Sharf 1995; and Taves 1999. Hanegraaff 1995 and 1998b, Jantzen, and Kripal provided helpful perspectives on the related histories of Western esotericism and mysticism. Fredericks, Murphy (in Rennie), and Penner provided helpful perspectives on the history of ideas in the modern era.

Pre-Reformation Christianity and Traditional Protestantism. The *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, s.v. "Expérience spirituelle," provides a helpful overview of pre-Reformation Christianity. Taves 1999, pp. 13–117, discusses traditional Protestant and early Enlightenment views of experience. For a more detailed discussion of "enthusiasm," see Klein and LaVopa. For a discussion of Protestant's changing view of mysticism, see Schmidt.

Universalistic New Religious Movements. Taken together, Taves 1999, pp. 166–260; Taves 2003b; and Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion* (1998), pp. 443–462, provide an overview of these movements and entry into the wider literature.

Liberal Protestant Theology. Welch provides a good overview. Sharpe (pp. 154–69) provides background on Soderblom, Otto, and Heiler. Kippenberg (pp. 125–135), describes the shift from religion as survival to religion as power. Crouter provides a concise overview of the contemporary debate with respect to Schleiermacher and experience in his introduction to *On Religion* (pp. xxxii–xxxiv). In addition to Merkur and Idinopulos on Otto (in Idinopulos and Yonan 1996), see also Raphael (pp. 60–84, 149–174) for a theologically oriented reassessment of "numinous experience" in the wake of critiques by Smart and Katz. For discussion and critique of recent efforts by Protestant philosophers of religion to defend theism using the concept of religious experience, see Jantzen, pp. 328–339, and Bagger, pp. 109–134, 197–228.

Catholicism after Trent. Hill provides an overview from a Catholic perspective. For further discussion of the Vatican I references to experience, see Walter. For a discussion of Catholic modernism and religious experience, see Dubarle. For an overview of Catholic theology in relation to the modern turn to the subject, Brian J. Shanley, O.P., *The Thomist Tradition* (Boston, 2002), pp. 1–20.

Judaism and Islam. Biale provides an excellent overview of the relationship between Scholem and the early Buber in the context of the study of Judaism in the late nineteenth and twen-

tieth centuries. On Buber's use of *Erlebnis*, see also Friedman, pp. 76–93, 319–325. Among Moshe Idel's many writings, see *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, 1988) and *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany, 1995). Ernst (1997), pp. 1–17, provides a helpful historical overview of the European discovery and study of Sufism. Gude is the best introduction to Massignon in English. Wasserstrom offers a helpful discussion of Corbin.

Hinduism and Buddhism. Halbfass's essays on "The Concept of Experience" and "Neo-Hinduism" in Halbfass, pp. 378–402, 217–246, provide an excellent overview of the idea of experience in Neo-Hinduism. Sharf's "Buddhist Modernism" and "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism" provide the best overview of the concept of experience in modern Buddhism. On the impact of the World's Parliament of Religions, see "The 1893 World's Parliament of Religions and Its Legacy" in Kitagawa 1987, pp. 353–68, and Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West* (Chapel Hill, 2003).

William James. There is a vast literature on William James. Within religion, most of the recent discussion of *Varieties* has taken place among philosophers of religion and scholars of mysticism (e.g., Proudfoot, Bagger, Barnard, Jantzen, Lamberth). For a good introduction to James in relation to the modern study of mysticism, see Furse, pp. 9–28. Jantzen reads James's chapter on mysticism in relation to Schleiermacher and the Romantic tradition, pp. 304–321, and critiques philosophers of religion for their ahistorical utilization of James's chapter on mysticism, pp. 330–332. Barnard focuses his reading on James's epistemology, utilizing it to support Forman's position in the Katz-Forman debate. Long (pp. 158–172) provides a helpful critical discussion of James and Troeltsch in relation to the study of religion. Taves 2003b, building on Taves 1999: 253–291, treats James from the perspective of comparison in the study of religion.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. For biographical details, see Radhakrishnan's autobiography in McDermott. Radhakrishnan's key writings on religious experience can be found in *The Hindu View of Life* (1927), pp. 11–33, and *An Idealist View of Life* (London, 1932), pp. 84–126. McDermott also provides a helpful philosophically oriented introduction to his thought. *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, edited by Paul A. Schilpp (New York, 1952), includes numerous tributes to Radhakrishnan, including Wach's somewhat critical contribution, "Radhakrishnan and the Comparative Study of Religion," pp. 443–458.

Joachim Wach and the Chicago Tradition. For a biographical sketch, see Kitagawa 1987: 271–74. Wach's most important writings on religious experience are *Sociology of Religion* (1944), "Universals in Religion" and "Rudolf Otto and the Idea of the Holy" in Wach, 1951: 30–47, 209–227, and Wach 1958. For Eliade's understanding of the sacred in relation to religious experience, see especially Eliade (1949/58) and J. Z. Smith (2000). For the argument that Eliade might be better positioned in relation to French discourses on the sacred (e.g. Durkheim) than in relation to Protestant phenomenologists such as Otto and van der Leeuw, see William E. Paden in Rennie (pp. 249–259) and in Idinopulos & Yonan 1994 (pp. 198–210). For a discussion of Otto, Eliade, Kitagawa, and Ricoeur as phenomenologists of religion, see

Twiss & Conser. For histories of the Chicago School under Wach and Eliade by insiders, see Kitagawa, "The History of Religions at Chicago" in Kitagawa 1987: 133–44, and Charles H. Long, "A Look at the Chicago Tradition in the History of Religions," in Kitagawa 1985: 87–104.

Mysticism, the numinous, and religious experience. On Zaehner, see Kripal 2001.

Critics. In addition to Segal (1983), Proudfoot (1985), Idinopulos and Yonan (1994, 1996), see also Long (1986), J. Z. Smith (1978, 2000), McCutcheon 1997 and the essays by McCutcheon, Murphy, and Paden in Rennie. For recent critical discussions of the Katz-Forman debate, see Hollenbeck, 1–25; Jantzen, 322–353; Brainard, and Bagger, 90–108. On method in the study of experience, see Taves 2003a.

New Directions. The essays in Cardeña, Lynn, and Kripner (2000) provide a good point of entry into the literature on religious experience and the clinical disciplines (clinical psychology, transpersonal psychology, and psychiatry). The edited volumes by Andresen (2001) and Pyysiäinen and Anttonen (2002) provide an overview of the most recent work on cognitive science approaches to religion, including several authors that focus on religious experience (see, in addition to Pyysiäinen, the articles by McNamara and Barrett in Andresen). The edited volume by Andresen and Forman (2000) draws together a wider range of studies that can be loosely grouped under the heading of conscious studies and religious/spiritual experience. Hollenbeck's interest in supernatural phenomena places him in the tradition of Myers and James and of more recent works, such as Michael Murphy's *The Future of the Body* (Los Angeles, 1992), but raises questions that most scholars of religion have so far avoided.

ANN TAVES (2005)

RENAN, ERNEST (1823–1892) was a French Orientalist and essayist. Joseph Ernest Renan is a fragment of a mirror held up to nineteenth-century France. His life and work reflect especially the appeal of positivist science and its conflict with religion, particularly Roman Catholicism.

Born on February 28, 1823, in Tréguier, Brittany, Renan was raised a Roman Catholic and educated in seminaries until, at the age of twenty-two, he left both the seminary and the church. He wrote to his spiritual director that the church would not allow him the freedom to pursue the kind of scientific study that had increasingly fascinated him. Three years later, in 1848, he wrote *L'avenir de la science* (The Future of Science), a kind of apologia for his conversion to positivist science. In it Renan developed the ideas that would govern virtually all his later work. First, he thought that science would eventually supplant religion in developed societies. "Only science," he wrote, "can resolve eternal human problems." Second, he understood science as an inquiry that exhibits a comparative, skeptical, and nonjudgmental attitude toward its subject, and so distinguishes itself from doctrinaire religion as well as eighteenth-century rationalism.

The Future of Science was not published until 1890, two years before Renan's death; nevertheless, his attitude toward

and confidence in science showed clearly in his work on Middle Eastern languages and religion. Renan's interest in the Middle East began during his seminary study in Paris, where he worked under Arthur Le Hir and Étienne Marc Quatremère. In 1848 he won the prestigious Prix Volney for his essay on the history of Semitic languages. In 1852 he was appointed an assistant to the keeper of Eastern manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, where he was in charge of Syrian, Sabaeen, and Ethiopian manuscripts; this work, he once said, was the most rewarding he had done. During the same period, he published his doctoral thesis on the Arab philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroës).

As a result of this work Renan had begun to earn a reputation as an Orientalist and so was able to secure a place on a scientific mission to Syria that was organized under the protection of the troops of Napoleon III, who were occupying Beirut. Despite the tragedy of the death of his sister, Henriette, who had always aided and supported his work and who had accompanied him and his wife to Syria, the trip was a milestone for Renan because it cemented his interest in the Middle East and set him to work on what would be the major accomplishment of his professional life, the seven-volume *Histoire des origines du christianisme* (1863–1881) and its five-volume supplement, *Histoire du peuple d'Israël* (1887–1893).

The first volume of *Origines* was the controversial and enormously popular *Vie de Jésus* (Life of Jesus). This little book, which first appeared in 1863, gave educated Frenchmen Renan's idiosyncratic portrait of Jesus. What made the book remarkable in its time, however, was its effort to draw the portrait of Jesus only along the lines roughed out by historical criticism and to project it against the larger background of the Middle Eastern religions. It showed Renan's comparative method at work, and because it failed to make or support the traditional religious claims about the divinity of Jesus or the uniqueness of Christian religion, it was widely condemned by the churches.

Renan returned to the Middle East again in 1864, this time to Egypt, Asia Minor, and Greece. It was on this trip that Renan composed the *Prière sur l'Acropole*, which expressed what he called his religious revelation that the perfection promised by Judaism, Islam, and Christianity actually existed in the Greek civilization that created science, art, and philosophy. Since religion is, in Renan's view, the way people often satisfy their craving for such perfection, he continued to pursue his research into the relationships among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. His thesis was that Christianity adapted Judaism to the European temperament and Islam adapted it to the Arab.

Renan's historical sense was not always the best, and he clearly preferred to draw his conclusions from what he thought were psychological patterns of the races and religions he studied. He speculated a good deal more freely than scholars are accustomed to do today (for example, he described in detail the physical appearance of Paul of Tarsus),