



The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature

Dr. William James

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In 'The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature', Dr. William James takes aim at the nature of religion from a scientific/academic point of view--something that had, until this landmark work, been sorely missed. James believed that the study of the origin of an object or concept should not play a role in the study of its value. As an example, he alluded to the Quaker religion and its founder, George Fox. Many scientists immediately reject all aspects of the Quaker religion because evidence suggests that Fox was schizophrenic. Calling this rejection medical materialism, he insisted that the origin of Fox's notions about religion should not be considered when placing a value on them. He pointed out that many believed El Greco to have suffered from astigmatism, yet no one would dismiss his art based on this medical detail. "Scientific theories are organically conditioned just as much as religious emotions are; and if we only knew the facts intimately enough, we should doubtless see 'the liver' determining the dicta of the sturdy atheist as decisively as it does those of the Methodist under conviction anxious about his soul. When it alters in one way the blood that percolates it, we get the Methodist, when in another way, we get the atheist form of mind."- Dr. William James

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