

## **James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*** [400-level]

### **Course Description**

In his 1902 bestselling book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James sets out on a quest no less ambitious than to articulate the foundations for a science of religion. His purpose behind this is better revealed in the subtitle: *A Study of Human Nature*. To James, religious experiences were a central aspect of what it means to be human. James argued, controversially, that religious life was not limited by the performance of particular religious rites or even adherence to a particular religion. Rather, religious life was founded exclusively on individual, and intensely personal, experiences wherein the individual came into contact with something bigger than herself (including nothingness, in some cases). In this course, we will work our way through James's fascinating and exciting text, confronting such topics as the weakness of will, the sick soul, healthy-mindedness, the divided self, conversion, and meliorism. We will bring in other works and other philosophers as needed.

### **Instructional Support**

#### **Course Logistics**

<b>Prerequisites:</b>	N/A	<b>Antirequisites:</b>	N/A
<b>Course Format:</b>	LEC, SEM	<b>Seminar Sections:</b>	TBA
<b>Course Times:</b>	TBA	<b>Course Location:</b>	TBA

#### **Instructional Team**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Email</b>	<b>Office</b>	<b>Hours</b>	<b>Role</b>
Dr. Kyle Bromhall	kyle.bromhall@outlook.com	TBA	TBA	Instructor
Teaching Assistant 1	TBA	TBA	TBA	TA: 01 & 02
Teaching Assistant 2	TBA	TBA	TBA	TA: 03 & 04
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### **Required Learning Resources**

1. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*
2. Various articles, as indicated on the schedule

These texts will be used extensively; as such, it is *highly suggested* that you purchase or rent a copy of your own.

## Primary Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, a successful student will...

### Depth and Breadth of Content

### Application of Knowledge

### Communication Skills

1. Be able to articulate the central themes of James's *Varieties*.
2. Be able to explain how our psychology of belief influences our understanding of religious beliefs.
3. Be able to explain how our psychology of action influences how we conceive of all belief, both religious and non-religious.
4. Analyze arguments into standard form, identifying premises, conclusions, and inferences.
5. Develop a tentative position on the relation between belief and action.
6. Assess the state of public discourse about religion and science.
7. Contribute to in-seminar discussions on course material.
8. Develop a thesis and defend it in an analytic research paper.

## Course Assessments

### Midterm Paper (20%)

This is a short (1400-word) essay on a topic that is drawn from the unit "The Religious Self." Topics will be assigned by the Professor, but you will get to choose from those topics. Although short, this is a *formal essay* and will be graded as such.

### Argumentative Essay (30%)

This will be a medium-length (2250-word) essay on a topic of your choice. In each case, you will be asked, in part, to relate a paper from the secondary reading list with a paper from the primary reading list, and to consider their relative strengths and weaknesses. You *must* clear your topic with the Professor *at least three weeks before the due by date*.

### Socratic Notes (20%)

Socrates was known for teaching by asking questions. In these assignments, you will play the role of both a Socratic teacher (by asking questions of the course material) and the Socratic student (by answering the questions on behalf of the material). Your questions should focus on concepts, information, explanations, and evidence. Your answers should be no more than one or two sentences.

### Final Examination (30%)

Who doesn't love an opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency with the material under a time constraint? Date, time, and location to be determined.

### **Revocable Bonus Marks**

**Factfinding Bonus.** Everyone gets a three-point bonus to their earned grade for reading the Syllabus/Course Outline. You lose this bonus by proving to me that you have not read the Syllabus; you prove to me that you have not read the Syllabus by asking me (or your Teaching Assistant) a question that is explicitly answered on the Syllabus. This policy takes effect once I step outside the classroom after the first meeting.

**Altruism Bonus.** Everyone in the class gets a three-point bonus to their earned grade, unless Student Accessibility Services is still contacting me about a note-taker after the second week of class. Then everyone loses the bonus.

**Mercy Bonus.** If you only just barely fail to reach the next tier of grades, you will receive a bonus equal to what will take you to the next tier. The maximum value is 1.1%.

## Course Schedule

*All information subject to change with notice.*

Week	Primary Reading
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### Preliminaries

01	Syllabus; James, <i>Principles</i> (selections) and “The Will to Believe”
02	“Religion and Neurology” and “The Reality of the Unseen” (Chs. 1 & 3)

### The Religious Self

03	“The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness” (Chs. 4 & 5)
04	“The Sick Soul” (Chs. 6 & 7)
05	
06	“The Divided Self” (Ch. 8)
07	

### The Saint, the Mystic, and the Philosopher

08	“Conversion” and “Conversion— <i>concluded</i> ” (Chs. 9 & 10)
09	“Saintliness” (Chs. 11-13)
10	“The Value of Saintliness” (Chs. 14 & 15)
11	“Mysticism” (Chs. 16 & 17)
12	“Philosophy” (Ch. 18)

## Secondary Reading List

*This list will grow as the term progresses.*

### Preliminaries

Clifford, W.K. "The Ethics of Belief"  
Dewey, John. "The Psychology of Effort"  
James, *Pragmatism*.  
----- . *The Principles of Psychology*.  
----- . "Rationality, Activity and Faith"  
Kirman, Alan, et al. "Rationality and emotions"

### The Religious Self

Albritton, R. "Freedom of Will and Freedom of Action"  
Augustine, *Confessions*.  
Davidson, Donald. *Essays on Actions and Events*.  
Dennett, D. *Elbow Room*.  
Erasmus, Desiderius. "On Free Will"  
Frankfurt, Harry. "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"  
----- . "The Problem of Action"  
Gale, Richard. *The Divided Self of William James*.  
Gert, B., and T. Duggin, "Free Will as Ability to Will"  
Hare, R. *Freedom and Reason*.  
Holton, R. "Intention and Weakness of Will"  
James, William. "The Sentiment of Rationality"  
Luther, Martin. "On the Bondage of the Will"  
van Inwagen, Peter. *An Essay on Free Will*.  
----- . "An Argument for Incompatibilism"  
----- . "Ability and Responsibility"  
Watson, Gary. "Free Action and Free Will"

### The Saint, the Mystic, and the Philosopher

Algaier, Ermine. "Epistemic Sensitivity and the Alogical: William James, Psychical Research, and the Radical Empiricist Attitude"  
Barnard, G. William. *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism*.  
Gale, Richard. *The Philosophy of William James: An Introduction*.  
----- . "Pragmatism Versus Mysticism: The Divided Self of William James"  
James, William. "A Suggestion About Mysticism"  
----- . "What Psychical Research Has Accomplished"  
Schlecht, Ludwig. "Mysticism and Meliorism: The Integrated Self of William James"  
Walker, Lawrence. "Morality, Religion, Spirituality—the Value of Saintliness"  
Wynn, Mark. "Saintliness and the Moral Life"