

تجربه دینی اسلامی^۱

اصطلاح «تجربه دینی» در غرب، در دو جریان اساسی و متفاوت تکامل یافته است؛ یکی در آثار شلایر ماخر (۱۷۶۸-۱۸۳۴) و دیگری در آثار ویلیام جیمز (۱۸۴۲-۱۹۱۰) اما در فلسفه دین معاصر و مطالعات دین، امروزه خلط و ابهامی بین آن دو جریان متفاوت، در بحث تجربه دینی دیده می‌شود. بهره‌گیری از مفهوم تجربه دینی در حوزه مطالعات اسلامی چند سؤال مهم و تأمل‌برانگیز را به همراه دارد:

الف) تطبیق این مفهوم در حوزه اسلامی، که کاملاً متفاوت از خاستگاه اصلی آن مفهوم در غرب است، چه اندازه مجاز است؟

ب) اگر فرض کنیم که به کارگیری مفهوم تجربه دینی در برخی حوادث مربوط به حیات مسلمانان مجاز باشد، آیا تفاوت‌های بنیادی در انواع تجربه‌های دینی مسلمانان و مسیحیان وجود دارد؟

ج) حتی اگر فرض کنیم که انواع اصلی تجربه دینی بین مسلمانان و مسیحیان مشترک است، آیا نقش این تجربه‌های دینی در حیات دینی آنها یکسان است؟

برای پاسخ به پرسش‌های مذکور باید در سه موضوع داورى کرد:

۱. تجربه دینی در اسلام به چه معنای خاصی کاربرد دارد؟

۲. انواع تجربه‌های دینی اسلامی کدام‌اند؟

۱. این بخش به معرفی مقاله تجربه دینی اسلامی می‌پردازد که به زبان انگلیسی توسط پروفیسور لگنهاوزن نگارش یافته و در ادامه آمده و تلخیص و معرفی آن توسط آقایان مسعود آذربایجانی و دکتر محسن جوادی صورت پذیرفته است.

۳. تجربه‌های دینی چه نقشی در حیات دینی مسلمانان ایفا می‌کنند؟.

در این مقاله مؤلف چند مسأله اصلی را که در مفهوم تجربه دینی، در آثار شلایر ماخر و ویلیام جیمز وجود دارد، به ویژه از آن جهت که بر حیات دینی مسلمانان قابل تطبیق است، مورد بررسی قرار می‌دهد و امیدوار است که این مقاله گامی به سوی رسیدن به اهداف سه‌گانه فوق باشد.

یک نکته مهم در تفاوت مفهوم تجربه دینی در حوزه اسلام و مسیحیت این است که در عالم مسیحیت، تجربه دینی مفهومی بسیار عام است و شامل انواع حالت‌های احساسی، پدیدآمدن ایده‌های خاص ذهنی و نیز بصیرت‌ها و کشف و شهود عرفانی است؛ اما در جهان اسلام اینطور نیست و مثلاً به حالت‌های احساسی که در ضمن دعا و نیایش پیدا می‌شود، تجربه دینی اطلاق نمی‌گردد.

توجه به مقوله تجربه دینی در آثار شلایر ماخر و ویلیام جیمز در واقع واکنشی به تفسیرهای جزم‌گرای عقیدتی از دین است و آنها هر دو متفق‌القول‌اند که تأکید بر تجربه دینی ناشی از عدم وفاق بر ابعاد عقیدتی و نظری گزاره‌های دینی است. مطالعه جنبه‌های عقیدتی صرف، موجب غفلت و فراموشی گوهر دین است و تجربه دینی می‌تواند جان‌شینی برای اصول اعتقادی گردد. گفتمان شلایر ماخر درباره احساسات و بینشهای دینی، از جنبش رمانتیک آلمان نشأت می‌گیرد، درحالی‌که گفتمان جیمز درباره تجربه دینی از روان‌شناسی وونت و اصول پراگماتیسم (عمل‌گرایی) ناشی می‌شود. هر دوی اینها علی‌رغم تفاوتها، مشترکات و تشابهات بسیار دارند. هر دو در مقابل کوشش‌هایی که دین را منحصر به عقاید و اخلاق می‌کنند قرار می‌گیرند و معتقدند که دین بدون توجه به احساسات و هیجانات، قابل فهم نیست. البته هیچیک از این دو نمی‌خواهند مستقیماً عقاید و گزاره‌های دین را براساس تجربه دینی اثبات کنند. اینها بیشتر به حیات دینی درونی افراد می‌پردازند تا اثبات خدا یا پیامبر. هر دو در مقابل عقلانی کردن بیش از حد دین موضع‌گیری می‌کنند، ولی در عین حال، بدون کوشش برای توجیه یا اثبات باورهای دینی، برحسب دیدگاه خود از دین دفاع کرده و ارزش ایمان را آشکار می‌کنند (شلایر ماخر به نوعی بر استعداد دینی فطری آدمی تأکید می‌کند).

در مقابل دیدگاه شلایر ماخر که بر احساسات و عواطف در تجربه دینی تأکید داشت، دیدگاه وین پرادفوت است که در کتاب تجربه دینی اش می‌گوید: تجارب دینی از مفاهیم،

زبان، تداعی‌ها و رفتاری که در زمینه برخی سنتهای دینی اتفاق می‌افتد شکل می‌گیرد. در نظر ویلیام جیمز، تجربه دینی مستقل از پس‌زمینه‌های باورها و مفاهیم نیست. پراگماتیست‌ها بر ویژگیهای اجتماعی تجربه (متکی بودن بر اهداف و علایق در ارتباط با محیط و تفسیر آنها) تأکید می‌کنند. جیمز این نظریه را «تجربه‌گرایی تمام‌عیار» می‌خواند. وی عناصر ذهنی (درونی) تجربه دینی را از عناصر عینی (بیرونی) متمایز و از جنبه‌های درونی آن دفاع می‌کند (درحقیقت به نوعی بر اصالت فرد و فردگرایی در دین تأکید می‌کند). فردگرایی در اعماق احساسات و ابعاد مخفی‌تر لایه‌های زیرین شخصیت یافت می‌شود.

چارلز تایلور و کلیفورد گیرتز هر دو بر این «فردگرایی» جیمز در تبیین دین اشکال کرده‌اند که: اولاً، جیمز ابعاد جمعی دین را به حساب نیاورده است؛ به عنوان نمونه دین اسلام و بویژه ابعاد سیاسی اسلام؛ ثانیاً، با تعریفی که جیمز از «تجربه» کردن بیان می‌کند، به نظر می‌رسد که یک امر معقول و طبیعی نیست که بتوان برای نیل به آن کوشش کرد.

لیکن جیمز وقتی بر ابعاد فردی دین تأکید می‌کند، از ابعاد اجتماعی دین آگاه است و آنها را قبول دارد. اما ترجیح می‌دهد از ابعاد شخصی و خصوصی دین سخن بگوید، به این دلیل که ابعاد شخصی دین را اساسی‌تر و بنیادین‌تر از جنبه‌های نهادینه و عقیدتی دین می‌داند.

تایلور همچنین بر جیمز اشکال می‌کند که انحصار در دیدگاه وی، موجب می‌شود سه چیز نادیده گرفته شود: اولاً، ارتباط ما با عالم ملکوت می‌تواند به صورت دسته‌جمعی و مشترک (در یک مراسم) باشد؛ ثانیاً، هویت دینی بدون توجه به نوع معنویت آن دارای اهمیت اجتماعی برای مردم است و ثالثاً، ریاضت‌های معنوی سخت می‌تواند به عنوان شیوه مهمی برای نیل به شهود و مکاشفات دینی اتخاذ گردد.

نویسنده مقاله معتقد است که اشکال مهم‌تر بر جیمز این است که تجربه دینی را در یک فضای معرفت‌شناختی محصور کرده و صرفاً به فواید یا مضرات معنوی و روان‌شناختی آن توجه کرده، درحالی‌که از منافع سیاسی، اجتماعی، اخلاقی و سایر ارزشها غفلت کرده است. تجربه دینی که بخواهد از حرفهای یاوه و پوچ تبلیغ کند، بی‌اعتبار و بی‌ارزش است. علاوه بر این آموزه‌های الهیاتی و استدلالی نیز می‌تواند بر

اعتبار و وثوق تجربه دینی مقدم گردد (این نکته‌ای است که در مکتوبات عرفانی مسیحیت و اسلام هر دو به چشم می‌خورد).

ویلیام جیمز در مورد تجربه دینی در اسلام و وحی و مکاشفه‌های پیامبر اکرم صلی الله علیه و آله می‌گوید که از عالم ناهشیار (یا نیمه‌هشیار) سرچشمه می‌گیرد. البته این نکته به معنای بی‌حرمتی یا انکار آن از طرف خداوند نیست. لیکن اگر کسی مثلاً نظریه ابن سینا را مبنی بر اینکه وحی ارتباط انسان با عقل فعال است نپذیرد، از نظریه جیمز نیز تقریباً ناخرسند خواهد بود.

جیمز ارزش هر دین و هر ادعای قدسی را صرفاً بر اساس ثمرات آن قابل داوری می‌داند. این ثمرات عبارت‌اند از: آرامش خاطر، احسان، شکیبایی، خویش‌داری، تن‌آرامی، سلامت و پاکیزگی روح، پارسایی، اطاعت، فقر (زهد) و نقطه‌نظرات نسبت به دموکراسی و انسانیت. البته مقصود وی از دموکراسی یک نظام حکومتی خاص که در آن افرادی به عنوان مقامات رسمی انتخاب می‌شوند نیست، بلکه تساوی در مقابل خداوند، موردنظر است؛ یعنی معیار وی برای ارزش هر چیزی پراگماتیک (عمل‌گرایانه) است. از این رو داوری وی در مورد تجربه دینی نیز بر اساس آثار آن است.

البته صرفاً آثار محسوس و تجربه‌گرایانه موردنظر نیست بلکه با ملاحظه معیار فضیلت و راه مستقیم غایی که بتوان پیروی کرد. به هر حال کوتاهی جیمز در این است که به کارکردهای باورها بیش از دلایل آن اهمیت می‌دهد، این‌هم شاید به این علت باشد که با الهیاتی آشنا بود که از این جهت دارای ضعف بوده است.

تنها مورد دیگری که جیمز در کتاب انواع تجربه دینی، عطف توجهی به اسلام دارد، در فصل «عرفان» است که یکی دو صفحه از ترجمه فرانسوی کتاب «المنقذ من الضلال» غزالی را نقل می‌کند. وی با اذعان به قصور و کم‌اطلاعی مسیحیان از عرفان اسلامی، نکاتی را از غزالی نقل قول می‌کند که غزالی می‌گوید: برخی معارف از طریق تجربه دینی و پیروی از طریقت صوفیه (عرفا) بدست می‌آید. این معرفت به صورت «ذوق» (چشیدن) است. مراد غزالی همان چیزی است که در فلسفه اسلامی تحت عنوان «علم حضوری» از آن بحث می‌شود و جیمز با عنوان «احساس بی‌واسطه» از آن یاد می‌کند.

از دیدگاه جیمز اولاً، معرفت عرفانی اختصاص به عارفان مسلمان ندارد و وی نمونه‌هایی از مسیحیت ذکر می‌کند؛ ثانیاً، حالات عرفانی وقتی گسترش می‌یابند، قدرتی

مطلق فراتر از خود فرد دارند که نمی‌توان آنها را کنترل کرد (به‌طور غیراختیاری می‌آیند)؛ ثالثاً، هیچ‌گونه احساس مرجعیت و وظیفه‌ای از آن نشأت نمی‌گیرد تا بدون چون و چرا محتوای الهام و اشراق را بپذیرند و رابعاً، معرفت عرفانی، هیمنه معرفت عقلانی یا غیرعرفانی را که براساس فهم و استدلال است، درهم می‌شکند و راه دیگری را برای معرفت می‌گشاید. حقایق دیگری را به ما نشان می‌دهد که آزادانه می‌توانیم ایمان خود را همچنان حفظ کنیم.

ویلیام جیمز به جای آنکه تجربه دینی را مستقیماً برای «توجیه معرفتی» باورهای دینی بکار ببرد، تحت عنوان قدرت و اقتدار برای اعتقادات از آنها سخن می‌گوید. وی برای توجیه معرفتی باورهای دینی از «اراده معطوف به باور» و «حق باورداشتن» سخن می‌گوید. وی علیرغم گرایش پلورالیستی در مابعدالطبیعه، وحدت‌گرایی در متون عرفانی را بر حق می‌داند.

همان‌گونه که گیرتز و تایلور خاطر نشان کرده‌اند، ویلیام جیمز در بررسی تجربه دینی، ابعاد غیرفردی آن، مانند عناصر نهادینه و عقیدتی دین را مورد غفلت قرار داده است، بویژه در مطالعه علمی ادیانی مانند اسلام، این نکته بیشتر مورد اشکال خواهد شد. شاید به همین جهت صرفاً به بررسی صوفیه پرداخته که چه بسا آرای آنان با مسیحیت، نوافلاطونیان و آیین ودانتا در هند، مشترکات بیشتری نسبت به اسلام دارد. در ادبیات غرب و مستشرقان، واژه صوفیه^۱ به معنای راهی متفاوت از قواعد فقهی اسلام مطرح شده و حتی ابعاد اجتماعی صوفیه، نهادهای آنان و نقش آنها در سیاست، کاملاً مورد بی‌توجهی قرار گرفته است. از این رو صوفیه مورد نظر مستشرقان با مفهوم عرفان از دیدگاه ویلیام جیمز کاملاً متناسب است. خلاصه اینکه همان اعتراضاتی که کارل ارنست به مستشرقان است داشته، به طور مشابه، گیرتز و تایلور بر ویلیام جیمز داشته‌اند.

البته نقاط ضعف بررسی جیمز درباره تجربه دینی به عنوان گوهر دین، موجب بی‌اعتباری تجربه دینی فی حد نفسه نمی‌شود، همان‌طور که نقاط ضعف بررسی مستشرقان درباره صوفیه موجب نمی‌شود که اصل واقعیت صوفیه را نادیده بگیریم. انتقاد جدی دیگر بر دیدگاه جیمز در مورد تجربه دینی، نظریه آلتون است. اگرچه وی مشکلات مهمی را در خصوص نظریه جیمز استخراج کرده، لیکن تشابه تجربه دینی

و تجربه حسی مورد نظر آلستون نیز، قانع کننده نیست. در مورد دیدگاه آلستون چند نکته قابل ملاحظه است:

الف) احساس حضور خداوند بیشتر شبیه حالتهای رؤیاست تا احساس سرما و مانند آن.
ب) ما از طریق حواس مختلف، اطلاعات مورد نیازمان را از جهان خارج دریافت می کنیم، اما هیچ گونه حس خاصی نداریم تا در مورد امور معنوی هر وقت که بخواهیم اطلاعاتی بدست آوریم.

ج) تجربه دینی، کارکرد تجربی به عنوان ادراک حسی را ندارد. تجربه دینی بیشتر متکی بر فهم و بصیرت است تا تجربه ادراکی. کسی که مثلاً گیاه شناس نباشد می تواند یک بوته گز را ببیند و بشناسد، اما بدون بصیرت دینی و احساس مذهبی نمی توان فرشتگان را مشاهده کرد.

د) در تجارب دینی که بوسیله عرفای اسلام بحث می شود، تجربه ادراکی کمتر نقش ایفا می کند، بلکه «احوال و مقامات» اهمیت بیشتری می یابند. احوال و مقامات نتیجه و ثمره یک رشته پیشرفتهای اخلاقی، مراحل تزکیه نفس و سلوک معنوی است.

ر) برخلاف آلستون (مستقیماً) و جیمز (غیرمستقیم)، عرفای اسلام تجربه دینی را برای توجیه معرفتی باورهای دینی بکار نمی برند. به عنوان مثال غزالی، از طریق تجربه دینی نمی خواهد وجود خداوند را اثبات کند. البته وی معتقد است آموزش باید از طریق تجربه دینی باشد که از راه مراقبه بدست می آید و به معارف یقینی نایل می شود و این اولین گام برای ذوق یا چشیدن است.

اینک پس از این معرفی کوتاه، توجه خوانندگان محترم را به اصل مقاله جلب می نمایم.

Islamic Religious Experience^۱

The concept of *religious experience* is a foreigner in the Muslim world. In the West, it has two major lines of development: one line is connected to the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and the other to that of William James (1842-1910). Some sort of amalgamation of the two concepts is prevalent in this article is not to retrace these lines in order to criticize or elaborate the concept of religious experience *per se*. Instead, I will assume that the concept is extant, and ask how well it travels.

The employment of the concept of *religious experience* in studies of Islam raises several questions worthy of scrutiny.

First, there is the question of the legitimacy of using the concept in an area so far from its origins. In principle, this need cause no difficulty, as, for example, the fact that tungsten was first isolated from wolframite does not prevent us from identifying it as such when extracted from scheelite. Likewise, the appearance of the concept of religious experience in a Christian context in itself should not prevent applications of the concept to various aspects of the religious lives of Muslims. On the other hand, the assumptions underlying the concept of religious experience seem to be more culturally sensitive than those that might be unearthed through inquiries into the social construction of different types of minerals (Rocks, 1999, p:186-206).

Secondly, assuming that we are able to justify the application of a concept of religious experience to events in the lives of Muslims, we should ask

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whether there are any important differences between the religious experiences of Muslims and Christians. Are there types of religious experience that Muslims have that are unknown to Christians? Are there any types of specifically Christian religious experiences unknown to Muslims? Even if Christian and Muslim religious experiences range over the same types, are there not more subtle differences to be found between Christians and Muslims?

Thirdly, even if Christians and Muslims have the same basic sorts of religious experiences, the role of these experiences in religious life may be expected to differ. Are the same sorts of religious experiences central to the lives of Muslims and Christians? If the most important religious experiences of Muslims are significantly different from the most important religious experiences of Christians, what does this tell us about the differences between Islam and Christianity, or between Muslim and Christian religious life?

As a result of the attempt to respond to the issues mentioned above, we should reach: (1) a judgment about the applicability of the concept of religious experience to Islam, that is, an analysis of what sense, if any, can be given to the term *religious experience* by which it can be employed to further our understanding of Islam; (2) a typology of Islamic religious experiences; and (3) an account of the functions of Islamic religious experience in the religious lives of Muslims. In fact, my ambitions are not so high. In this paper I will only examine a few of the basic problems with the concepts of religious experience found in the works of Schleiermacher and James, particularly as applied to Muslim religious life; but I do hope that we can take a few preliminary steps toward all three of these goals.

Although it might be considered pedantic to question the legitimacy of the concept of *religious experience* in the context of Islam, serious questions have been raised about religious experience in general, and in particular within the

context of the same Christian culture that has given rise to the idea in the first place. Even if we grant the legitimacy of employing the concept for the sake of understanding Christian religiosity, this would not license the application of the concept to Islam. On the other hand, by taking issue with the application of the concept to Islam, we might well find reason to question the ideas associated with the use of the concept to the extent that the application of the concept to Christian life may also become dubious, despite our initial assumption to the contrary.

First of all, the concept of religious experience as it is used in Western philosophy of religion is a very broad concept. It covers all sorts of feelings, and occurrences of religious ideas, and not merely the visions and unveilings of the mystics. In the Muslim world, however, people will not readily consider feelings of divine beneficence during prayer, for example, as religious experiences. This may be a matter of terminology. There is nothing to prevent the philosopher of religion from defining religious experience so broadly as to include the occurrence of relatively mundane thoughts about one's present relation to God. In doing so, however, we must remember that there are many people who we will consider as having religious experiences, but who would not describe themselves in this way. The fact that people do not consider their religious experiences anyway. However, since experiences have the peculiarity of being constituted, at least in part, by how they appear to us, our description of a person's experience cannot be allowed to stray too far from what they themselves would affirm. One could always deny someone else's account of one's experience by saying that it was not like that.

In both Schleiermacher and James, the emphasis on religious experience grew out of dissatisfaction with theological theory and credal statements. Both thinkers felt that the study of dogma missed the essence of religion. Both introduced the concept of *religious experience* as an alternative to the

dominant focus of religious studies on apologetics. Schleiermacher's discussions of *religious feelings and intuitions* are conducted against the background of German Romanticism, while the religious experience of which James writes was influenced more by the psychology of Wundt and the pragmatist ideas he was soon to develop. The importance of the differences between James and Schleiermacher, however, must not be allowed to make us overlook the importance of their similarities. Both find the essence of religion in its most inward and personal manifestations. Both rebel against attempts to capture religion in the theological theory and moral exhortation. For both thinkers, religion cannot be properly understood unless due attention is given to feelings and emotions.

Another point shared by Schleiermacher and James - and more recent writers have often departed from this - is that neither of them tried to prove or justify any particular dogma on the basis of religious experience. Their purpose was to understand the interior life of religious people, not to prove the existence of God or his angels. There is something bold and zestful about Schleiermacher and James, each in a way that seems fitting for the age in which they lived. Both were reacting against the over-intellectualizing of religion. Without trying to prove or justify dogmas, however, both sought to defend *religion* as they understood it. They sought had encrusted it to reveal the value of faith in its intimacy with the person.

Schleiermacher thought that if religious faith were not uprooted, there would be no need for any argument to prove its claims, for the force of its intuitions would suffice to secure conviction. «A person is born with the religious capacity as with every other, and if only his sense is not forcibly suppressed, if only that communion between a person and the universe - these are admittedly the two poles of religion - is not blocked and barricaded, then religion would have to develop unerringly in each person according to his own individual manner» (Schleiermacher,

1996, p:59).

In his *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James, too, defends the force of inner experience to secure conviction as superior to attempts at rational proof. «In all sad sincerity I think we must conclude that the attempt to demonstrate by purely intellectual processes the truth of the deliverances of direct religious experience is absolutely hopeless» (James, 1928, p:455).

«They [feelings] are as convincing to those who have them as any direct sensible experiences can be, and they are, as a rule, much more convincing than results established by mere logic ever are» (Ibid, p:72).

Schleiermacher himself does not use the term *religious experience*. Instead he uses the Kantian term, *Anschauung* (intuition), which is contrasted with knowledge and practice. His goal is to present an accurate description of religious awareness or consciousness and thereby to show that religion cannot be reduced to a set of beliefs or moral codes. In this way, he sought to defend religion against the Romantics of his age who were dissatisfied with the moral conventions and dogmas of the European religious institutions. Instead, he would present religion as the inner life of the spirit. Schleiermacher thought that the focus on intuitions would also enable a defense of religion against doubts raised by the Kantian critique of speculative metaphysics and the sort of rationalism that was championed as Enlightenment. These doubts would be declared irrelevant to the truth of religion because religion is a matter of feeling and intuition, while the doubts are about the theoretical claims of theologians.

The chief characteristics of Schleiermacher's religious feelings and intuitions are that they are immediate and independent of beliefs and practices. Today, there is an active philosophical debate about whether experiences can ever be independent of beliefs and practices as Schleiermacher thought them to be. A quite prominent view in opposition to

Schleiermacher's is that all religious experiences are shaped by concepts, language, associations and behavior that occur in the context of some religious tradition. This view has been dubbed constructivism.¹ (Proudfoot, 1985).

The concept of *religious experience* employed by William James, in contrast to Schleiermacher, does not require experience to be direct to independent of background beliefs and concepts. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of pragmatism is a rejection of the notion of any sort of given epistemological foundations. For James and other pragmatists, experience is an activity through which whatever is encountered is shown to us. This is far from the theory of the British empiricists' view of experience as a passive registry of sensible data. Since the pragmatists' experience was taken to be a human activity, it was also held to depend upon human purposes and interests as one interacts with one's environment and repeatedly is called upon to interpret what is found there. Pragmatists stressed the social character of experience in place of the older conception of experience as a private content confined to the mind of an individual. Although James called his theory radical empiricism, his ideas about experience went far beyond what traditional empiricists were prepared to accept.

Even though James does not restrict experience to the inner states produced by sense perception, and seems skeptical of attempts to isolate the subjective or inward aspects of one's life from the rest of life, he does, finally, distinguish objective from subjective elements of experience, and he clearly champions the priority of the inward. This is not mere prejudice, or an unconscious Yankee individualism. James is aware of the criticisms, taken note of them, and sticks to his guns. James contends that it is only by living in

1. for discussion and criticism of Schleiermacher from a constructivist point of view. For a critique of constructivism, see Robert Forman, *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999).

the sphere of thought opened up by certain questions about destiny that one becomes profound; and that to live so, is to be religious. «By being religious we establish ourselves in possession of ultimate reality at the only points at which reality is given us to guard. Our responsible concern is with our private destiny, after all».

You see now why I have been so individualistic throughout these lectures, and why I have seemed so bent on rehabilitating the element of feeling in feeling; and the recesses of feeling, the darker, blinder strata of character, are the only places in the world in which we catch real fact in the making, and directly perceive how events happen, and how work is actually done. Compared with this world of living individualized feelings, the world of generalized objects which the intellect contemplates is without solidity or life» (James, 1902, p:501-2).

Whether or not one thinks that James adequately defends his individualism here, it has become a flashpoint. Let's consider how two most eminent critics have responded, Clifford Geertz and Charles Taylor. With reference to the passage quoted above, Geertz writes: «Cordoning off a space for "religion" in a realm called "experience" - "the darker blinder strata of character" - seems, somehow, no longer so reasonable and natural a thing to try to do. There is just too much one wants to call "religious", almost everything it sometimes seems, going on outside the self» (Geertz, 2000, p:169).

Taylor, who admits to having "greatly benefited" from Geertz's lecture voices the same sort of complaint: «What James can't seem to accommodate is the phenomenon of collective religious life, which is not just the result of (individual) religious connections, but which in some way constitutes or is that connection. In other words, he hasn't got place for a collective connection through a common way of being» (Taylor, 2002, p:24).

Now, for our purposes, what is especially provocative about the objections raised by both Geertz and Taylor is that they both take examples from the Islamic world as corroboration.

Geertz objects to taking the essence of religion to lie in personal belief, because that would result in leaving religion out of political events in which religion seems to play a crucial role.

«Political Islam, as it has come, misleadingly, to be called, ...represents an effort on the part of Muslims finally to engage the demands and energies of the modern world» (Geertz, 2000, p:173).

Geertz appears impatient with Muslims for not having been able to engage effectively with modernity, and whose efforts now seem rather ominous. **«But also again, not only are religious self - (and other -) identifications increasingly prominent in public square, "secular" discourse, but some extra ordinarily powerful ones, "Hindu", for example, or "Shi'i", have taken on an aggressive world - political currency only rather recently» (Geertz, 2000, p:175).**

He faults James for equating religion with private experience as if it were an futile method to try to keep religion from taking any political authority. **«Experience, pushed out the door as a radically subjective, individualized "faith state", returns through the window as the communal sensibility of a religiously assertive actor» (Geertz, 2000, p:178).**

Geertz sums up the argument of his lecture in a sentence: **«[I]n what we are pleased to call the real world, "meaning", "identity", "power", and "experience", are hopelessly entangled, mutually implicative, and "religion" can no more be founded upon or reduced to the last, that is, "experience", than it can to any of the others. It is not in solitude that faith is made» (Geertz, 2000, p:184).**

James himself, on the other hand, uses the examples he draws from the Muslim world to underline the importance of direct experience for religion. In response to the objections of Geertz and Taylor, one could say that James certainly was not unaware of the social and communal aspects of religion, and that he did not mean to deny them. Geertz and Taylor, on the other hand, are justifiably displeased with the way James simply ignores the sociological.

When James emphasized the personal, however, his individualism was not pitted against sociology, but against the over-intellectualization of religion, and against what he called the "survival theory" of religion, by which he meant the scientific vanity that religion is merely a holdover from a time when people did not know any better.

In lecture II of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James explicitly defends his "circumscription of the topic". He acknowledges that there is more to religion than what he is calling *religion* in the remainder of the book, and he explicitly states that he is not going to treat the institutional aspects of religion. We could justifiably find fault with James for not paying enough attention to the ways in which personal experiences are subject to the influence of social relations and relations with institution of religion. He is aware of it, but states that his interests lie elsewhere. His point is not to circumscribe *religion*, but to circumscribe the subject of his own investigations. He even expresses a willingness to give up the name *religion* for his topic. «Now in these lectures I propose to ignore the institutional branch entirely, to say nothing of the ecclesiastical organization, to consider as little as possible the systematic theology and the ideas about the gods themselves, and to confine myself as far as I can to personal religion pure and simple...

...I am willing to accept almost any name for the personal religion of which I propose to treat» (James, 1902, p:29-30).

He continues by giving reasons why he thinks that the personal aspects of religion are more fundamental than its institutional expressions (although he admits that the origins of genuinely religious feelings might be found in primitive fetishism and magic). This is something with which one might quarrel, but we should not think of James as though he were so blinded by his rugged individualism that he could not appreciate the fact that religion extends beyond the realm of the personal. His definition of religion has been

repeated and criticized on innumerable occasions, but look at the phrasing that introduces the definition: «**Religion, therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us 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 the divine**» (James, 1902, p:31).

James continues that the relation to the divine itself "may be either moral, physical, or ritual". He should have added "social or communal - even political". I don't think he would have objected to such an addition. He would still finish his paragraph with the same sentence: «**In these lectures, however, as I have already said, the immediate personal experiences will amply fill our time, and we shall hardly consider theology or ecclesiasticism at all**».

He should have added that he would hardly consider religious social structures and relations either, not because he would deny their existence or significance, but simply because he was fishing elsewhere. It is true that James sides with the heart against the head and with the maverick against the orthodox, but this taking sides is more a reflection of where James' own sympathies lie, not that there is any argument that religion does not take forms that he does not relish. Even in the personal aspects of religion championed by James, he admits that there are fanaticism and morbidity. His point is not to deny what he finds unattractive, but to insist that religion is capable of taking forms that are free from the features he finds ugly, while religion without some sort of grounding in personal feeling would amount to little more than hypocrisy.

So much for the defense of James. Even if James himself is innocent, the main thesis of his opponents remains: one cannot obtain an adequate understanding of religion if one restricts one's attention to the personal. Taylor concludes his little book by mentioning three things we might miss if we restrict our view of religion to what James presents: (1) our connection to

the sacred might be communally mediated even if it is kept out of politics; (2) religious identity can have social and political importance for people regardless of how spiritual they are; and (3) rigorous spiritual discipline may be adopted as an important way of responding to religious intuitions.

As I reread James, I don't find myself tempted to forget the points mentioned by Taylor. There seem to be sufficient mention of religious communities and formal spiritual discipline, although politics is certainly neglected. What seems more disturbing about James' view of religion is that it gives religious experience in an epistemically privileged status because of the rather limited view of the sorts of "fruits" by which they could be undermined. It is here that James seems to concentrate too exclusively on the spiritual and psychological benefits or harms that religious experience may bring, without considering communal, political, social, moral and other more theoretical costs and benefits. Religious experiences that lead one to propagate theological rubbish are invalid. The question of the standard we use to distinguish rubbish from sound theology is another matter, but the idea that theological constraints and constraints of reason can overturn the authority of an experience is something one often runs across on the writings of the mystics themselves in both Christian and Islamic traditions.

While James asks his readers to accept his definition of religion arbitrarily for the purposes of the ensuing enquiry, his own choice seems far from arbitrary, or at least it is not capricious. James attention to the private inner realms of religious feeling reflects the combination in his own personality of dissatisfaction with the public expressions of religion in rites and institutions, rejection of the philosophical theologies then current, and anti-clericalism together with a strong sense of personal piety.

Given James' focus on the inward and lack of interest in the social contexts in which religious experiences are normally embedded, the very idea

of religious experience may become suspect. *Religious experience* comes to seem like a code term in a program for the privatization of religion. This is an especially sensitive issue if we are going to consider applying the idea in the Islamic world.

James does not hesitate to apply analysis of religious experience to Islam, although he admits ignorance. He claims, "if we turn to Islam, we find that Muhammad's revelations all came from the subconscious sphere" (James, 1902, p:481). Of course, there is no need to take this as irreverence. Saying that revelation comes from the subconscious sphere need not be taken as a denial that it comes from God, although anyone who had trouble with Avicenna's theory of revelation (according to which revelation results from union with the active intellect) will not be very likely to favor James' theory.

James continues by citing Nöldeke on the history of the Qur'an where various narrations are mentioned that describe how the revelation became manifest to the Prophet, e. g., accompanied by sighing of the angel, or by the sound of a ringing, etc. He notes that none of the cases were "motor", that is, in none of the cases mentioned was the revelation through an impulse that directly caused a muscular reaction, as of the tongue. He leaves it there and continues with examples from other religious traditions.

There are several reasons why James, application of the concept of *religious experience* to the events of revelation experienced by the Prophet Muhammad does not sit well, aside from whatever qualms one might have about the function of the subconscious in divine revelation; and we should evaluate what is stated with some caution before pronouncing it odious. Of course, some might take offense at placing the Prophet along side other figures such as Philo of Alexandria, Joseph Smith, George Fox and a number of minor Catholic saints. But James does not claim that these figures all had the same sort of experience or that their experiences have equal validity, James

tries to take a more studiously non-judgmental position. He plays the role of the psychologist in the white lab coat examining specimens of religious claim.

The Prophet is classed with others who claimed to have frequent inspirations "with distinct professions of being under the direction of a foreign power" (James, 1902, p:479). The reason for classing specimens together is merely the similarity of the claims made on the part of the subjects to the experiences under inspection.

If what is religiously essential about divine revelation cannot be fathomed in this way, so be it, James is not trying to uncover the essence of revelation, or what distinguishes divine revelation from delusion. Nevertheless, the impression is given that the claim to prophecy is made solely on the basis of the phenomenological characteristics of some private mental states. James does not say this, however. What he does say is that the value of any religion, and likewise the value of any claim to saintliness, is to be judged solely on the basis of its fruits (James, 1902, p:327).

What fruits? The table of contents of the latter part of the lecture on saintliness gives the answer: peace of mind, charity, equanimity, fortitude, connection of this with relaxation, purity of life, asceticism, obedience, poverty, and the sentiments of democracy and humanity. By *democracy*, James does not refer to a system of government through elected officials; rather he speaks of the feeling of being equal to others under God: «**There is also the mystery of democracy, or sentiment of the equality before God of all his creatures. This sentiment (which seems in general to have been more widespread in Mohammedan than in Christian lands) tends to nullify man's usual acquisitiveness**» (James, 1902, p:324).

James' fruits are largely, but not merely moral. Consider what he has to say about poverty. «**Since Hindu fakirs, Buddhist monks, and Mohammedan dervishes unite with Jesuits and Franciscans in idealizing poverty at the loftiest individual state,**

it is worth while to examine into the spiritual grounds for such a seemingly unnatural opinion...

In short, lives based on having are less free than lives based either on doing or on being, and in the interest of action people subject to spiritual excitement throw away possessions as so many clogs. Only those who have no private interests can follow an ideal straight way» (James 1902, p:317-319).

So, even though James is mostly focused upon the phenomena of religious experiences without regard to whether they are trustworthy or not, he does not hold the view that it is the phenomenological characteristics of these experiences by which they are to be ultimately evaluated as being credible or not. His criteria are pragmatic. We should see what effects the experiences have. The effects, however, are not to be measured in terms of a crass empiricism that is suspicious of anything beyond sense perception, but by consideration of virtue and what it takes to follow "an ideal straight contemporary empiricists as Bas van Fraassen (2002), the use of the term *empiricism* by James seems something of a misnomer, when he writes of "our empiricist criterion: By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots".¹

We could find fault with James because of his impatience with theology were it not for the fact that so much of the theology with which he was familiar consisted of such poor arguments that seem to function more as excuses for beliefs than as reasons for them. In any case, James is perhaps more dismissive of a *Priori* methods than he has just cause to be. «We cannot

1. The phrase is from the Gospel of Mathew (7:15-20): "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (KJV) Does this mean that Jesus or the evangelist were empiricist? Pragmatists?

distinguish natural from supernatural effects; nor among the latter know which are favors of God, and which are counterfeit operations of the demon. We have merely to collect things together without any special a Priori theological system, and out of an aggregate of piecemeal judgments as to the value of this and that experience - judgments in which our general philosophic prejudices, our instincts, and our common sense are our only guides - decide that on the whole one type of religion is approved by its fruits, and another type condemned» (James, 1902, p:327).

James continues here with a defense of his own rather idiosyncratic version of empiricism, but later, in Lecture XVIII, "Philosophy," he provides a few caveats along with a more lengthy argument against attempts to found religion on the basis of philosophical argumentation. The caveats consist mostly of an admission that it is philosophical argumentation. The caveats consist mostly of an admission that it is only natural for human beings to seek to systematize and apply reason to their experiences, and that the systems so constructed might even themselves play some role in subsequent experience. The basis for his rejection of metaphysical theology is a reliance on experience construed so broadly that scant reason remains to think that metaphysics itself cannot be justified on its basis. The chief targets of James' attack on philosophy seem to be Hegelian. So James may be counted among numerous others, including thinkers as different as Kierkegaard and Carnap, who have been motivated to attempt to philosophize in a new way because of their being irritated by Hegelianism. Despite his "radical empiricism" James seems to have no trouble advocating a metaphysical pluralism that goes far beyond anything that could be defended on the basis of the deliverances of sense perception.

The only other place in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* where James makes more than a passing mention of Islam is in the section on mysticism, where he translates a couple pages from Schmolders' French translation of

Ghazali's *Al-Munqidh min al-Qalal* (James, 1902, p:402-405).¹ James introduces the passage with a confession of ignorance: «**We Chhristians know little of Sufism, for its secrets are disclosed only to those initiated. To give its existence a certain liveliness in your minds, I will quote a Moslem document, and pass away from the subject**» (James, 1902, p:402).

What we find of Ghazali in James is, thus, little more than a summary of a few pages from the *Munqidh*, but instead of merely quoting and pssing away, as promised, the selection from Ghazali serves to set in motion a series of reflections that leads James to a qualified endorsement of mysticism. James quotes Ghazali on the importance of *dhawq* (literally, tasting), which in James gets traslated as transport, but in Wattes translation is immediate experience. Actually, James could have made his point better if he had had watt's translation. Be that as it may, James takes from Ghazali the claim that some sort of knowledge is available by means of religious experience to those who follow the Sufi path, and that this knowledge is incommunicble, which is the keynote of all mysticism.

The *dhawq* or tasting of which Ghazali speaks, is, of course, what is usually discussed in Islamic philosophy under the heading of *ilm al-huduri* or knowledge by presence (Yazdi, 1992). James takes this to be a sort of immediate feeling. This leads James to a puzzle: «**But our immediate feelings have no content but what the five senses supply; and we have seen and shall see again that mystics may emphatically deny that the senses play any part in the very highest type of knowledge which their transports yield**» (James, 1902, p:405).

So, what is James to make of the knowledge claims of the mystics? First,

1. For a complete English translation of the text from which the summary that appears in James (1902) is taken, see W. Montgomery watt, *The faith and practice of al-Ghazali* (Chicago: Kazi, 1982; originally published in london by George allen and Unwin, 1956), 54-68. James also makes reference to another translation by Schmolders of Shabistari's *Golshan-e Raz*, which he compares with Plotinus, Suso, and Silesius. James (1902), 420.

James asserts that such claims are not peculiar to Sufism, and he cites some examples from the Christian tradition. Then he offers a medical diagnosis: "Suggested and imitated hypnoid states, on an intellectual basis of superstition, and a corporeal one of degeneration and hysteria" (James, 1902, p:413). However, instead of dismissing the value of mysticism on this basis, he mocks the medical talk as superficial, and asserts the need to evaluate the fruits of mystical states for life. (The dissatisfaction with the medical appraisal - on how mysticism can change one's life is what James calls empiricism!) After considering the lives of a few Christian saints, James reaches the conclusion that mysticism is indeed effective, but that the effect can only be counted as an advantage if the inspirations gained through it are true. How can we tell whether they are true? We seem to be launched on a circle in which truth can only be evaluated on the basis of fruits whose value depends on the deliverance of truth! The conclusion James draws has three parts:

(1) Mystical states, when well developed, usually are, and have the right to be, absolutely authoritative over the individuals to whom they come.

(2) No authority emanates from them which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically.

(3) They break down the authority of the non-mystical or rationalistic consciousness, based upon the understanding and the senses alone. They show it to be only one kind of consciousness. They open out the possibility of other orders of truth, in which, so far as anything in us vitally responds to them, we may freely continue to have faith (James, 1902, p.422-423).

While James began by seeking to discover what value if any there is in religious experience, he concludes with an odd discussion of authority. James is not concerned here with the political and social functions of religious authority, but with epistemology.¹

1. This point is also made by William P. Alston in his *Perceiving God* (Ithaca: Cornell

Contemporary philosophers of religion often ask whether various beliefs can be justified on the basis of religious experiences. The use of justification as a technical term in epistemology, only seems to have gained currency through the influence of James' student, C. I. Lewis (1929), so instead of speaking of experiences justifying beliefs, James talks about them having authority. Here we clearly have a deontic concept of epistemic justification, for the authority of which James speaks imposes a duty of acceptance.¹ Reportedly, James regretted the choice of words for have called it "The Right to Believe". His biographer understands perfectly well that the issue was one of epistemic justification, while detractors accused James of the idea that willing something to be true could make it so. "He was accused of encouraging willfulness or wantonness of belief, or of advocating belief for belief's sake, whereas his whole purpose had been to justify belief (perry, 1935, p:275).

James concedes that the monism that seems prevalent in so many of the writings of the mystics might be true, after all, despite his own preference for a pluralistic metaphysics.² He never resolves the puzzles about how feelings can result in beliefs with cognitive content or what kind of feelings there are aside from those associated with the five senses; yet even the modest authority James wishes to accord to mystical states - with the odd phrase that they have a right over those to whom they come - would seem to depend on how these puzzles are resolved; and even more so, the bold claim that the authority of the understanding and sense experience must give way to truth apprehended

University Press, 1991), 281.

1. For alternative concepts of epistemic justification, see William P. Alston, *Epistemic Justification* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

2. His pluralism is asserted much earlier on in the *Varieties*: see James (1902), 131. The metaphysical pluralism that James ultimately favored, however, was not as opposed to monism as one would imagine. See William James, *A Pluralistic Universe*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996, first published in 1909) and the appraisal by Ralph Barton Perry (1948), 328-334.

through mystical experience remains without any adequate defense if James is going to insist on anything like empiricism as it is normally understood. To move beyond this sort of empiricism, James owes us an account of how mystical experience acquires the rights to epistemic justification he would concede to it. Alston expresses skepticism about the ability of Schleiermacher or James to provide such an account precisely because of their identification of religious experience as a kind of feeling. «The treatment of "religious experience" as essentially consisting of "feelings" or other affective states is very common. Thus in Schleiermacher, the fountainhead of concentration on religious experience in the study of religion, we find the basic experiential element of religion treated as a "feeling of absolute dependence". Rudolf Otto and William James also concentrate on feelings. It must be confessed that in all these cases the theorists also characterize religious experience as cognitive of objective realities in ways that seem incompatible with the classification as affective. I doubt very much that any consistent account of religious experience can be found in the works of any of these people» (Alston, 1991, p:16).

In the Conclusion to the Varieties, James again refers to Ghazali to make the point that there is a difference between theoretical knowledge about religion in the form of a science of religion and the knowledge gained through religious experience itself. Again, James finds himself confronting the question of whether the content of religious experience is credible or not. Once again, he hesitates. Subjectively, one has a right to believe that one's experiences are veridical. Beyond that, James searches for something common to the varieties. He has no trouble finding it. But for an evaluation, he remains so shy of theology that he will not allow it to be employed in order to come to any decision, and he doesn't consider the broader social context of religious life or its history at all. So, we are left with the endorsement of a religion made private not by anything inherent to the concept of religious experience as James defines it, but restricted to the private by James' skepticism about

dogmatic theology and his neglect of the social and historical.

While there is nothing intrinsically objectionable about the application of his concept of religious experience to Islam, the tendency exhibited by James to ignore those aspects of religion that are not oriented toward individual subjective experience, such as the institutional and dogmatic elements of religion, is an obstacle to gaining an adequate understanding of religion in general, as Geertz and Taylor have pointed out, and is likewise problematic for the study of the specific religions, including Islam, in particular. It is no accident that James turns to Sufism for examples of mysticism, and does not have much else to say about how Muslims experience their religion. In this, James follows the example set by such Orientalists as Sir William Jones (d. 1794) and Sir John Malcolm (d. 1833), and others often associated with the British East India Company, who saw Sufis as having more in common with Christianity, neo-Platonism and Indian Vedanta than with the Islam of the opponents of the British Empire. Sufism is presented as so alien to Islam, that these authors often speculate that its origins lie in Hinduism. The very term Sufism seems to have been invented at the end of the eighteenth century as an appropriation of aspects of Oriental culture that such Europeans found attractive (Ernst, 1997, p:9).

Carl Ernst explains how Orientalists made Sufism into a pantheistic mysticism, where the concept of pantheism was drawn more from the European debate of the late 1780's about Spinoza than from the works of the Muslim mystics themselves and that they "entirely ignored the social context of Sufism as expressed in the Sufi orders, the institutions formed around saints' tombs, and the role of Sufis in politics" (Ernst, 1997, p:16). The Orientalists separated Sufism from Islam in such a way that Islam was presented as a harsh legalism while Sufism was supposed to be indifferent to matters of religious law (Ernst, 1997, p:19).

The Sufism of the Orientalists fits James' conception of mysticism perfectly. It is primarily a religion of mystical experiences and a vague monism or pantheism in which those aspects of religion for which James had little patience are at best secondary. Where James does mention Islam, apart from Sufism and the revelatory experiences of the Prophet (may the peace and blessings of Allah be with him and with his folk), it is only in passing references and a footnote on the fanaticism of a Shi'ite dervish, without seeming to notice any connection between the fanaticism of the dervish and the mysticism of the Sufi (James, 1902, p:341).

The objections to Orientalism made by Carl Ernst also bear a striking similarity to the objections against James' treatment of religion by Geertz and Taylor (Taylor, 2002, p:17). The view presented of the object of study is skewed by a neglect of all but its most private aspects.

The flaws in James' treatment of religious experience as the essence of religion do not invalidate the concept of religious experience itself, just as the flaws in the Orientalists' understanding of Sufism do not mean that we can say that Sufism is a mere British concoction with no reality of its own.

More serious criticism of James' view of religious experience surfaces when one examines the epistemological use to which he would put the concept. Alston is very insightful here. However, it is only natural that Alston is primarily interested in criticizing James from the perspective of his own defense of religious experience as being on a par with sense experience in providing justification for beliefs formed on its basis. It seems to me that this sort of move is questionable on phenomenological grounds. Be that as it may, Alston points out important problems with the view of religious experience found in James.

I find Alston's attempt to view religious experience on analogy with sense experience unsatisfying, although I have to admit that for many years Alston

has very ably defended his position from those who have argued that religious experience just isn't like sense perception. Still, religious experience is just different from sense experience. In saying this, I owe Alston an explanation of how it is different. Well, sensing the presence of God in one's life is not like sensing that it is chilly outside today, not just in the obvious way that the objects of the perceptions are very different and the senses used are different. For one thing, even if we are going to accept that there is some sort of *sensus divinitas* implanted in human beings by God, it is not like a sixth sense or some sort of radar that homes in on spiritual presences. It is more like one's entire sensibility is directed toward the divine so that His manifestations are noticed in nature, dreams, trances, moods, coincidences or whatever.

Secondly, we use our senses to get information about the perceptible world by directing them appropriately, as when I look out the window to see whether it is still raining; but we don't direct our inner senses to find out things about the spiritual world in that sort of way. We don't use our spiritual sensitivity to find out if God still loves us or whether the angelic presence is that of *Izra'il* or *Israfil*. We might acquire such information in some religious experience, but we don't look and see. We don't control the experience in that sort of way.

Thirdly, and most importantly, religious experience does not have the same sort of epistemic function for the subject of the experience as sense perception. Here, Alston could accuse me of question begging. After all, this is precisely what Alston is out to demonstrate. However, my point is that the ways in which certainty is gained through religious experience are very different from the ways in which sense perception gives one a sense of certainty about things. It's sort of like the difference between the certainty that you love your mother and the certainty that you just spoke to her in the kitchen. It's not that one fact is more certain than the other, but that the

certainty of loving takes into account our entire being in a way that sense perception doesn't. Religious experience leans more heavily on understanding and insight than perceptual experience. This is most noticeable in the more contemplative forms of religious experience, but I would stick my neck out and claim that it is even true of the more visceral sorts of religious experience discussed by Otto (1958), the sense of the holy, the attraction and awe we feel in the presence of what is sacred. To sense something as holy we have to do more than just feel a mixture of attraction, awe and not knowing quite what to make of it, for one can have such feelings in a huge factory just as well as in a huge cathedral. The difference lies in the complex context of other beliefs, particularly religious beliefs, and our understanding of how the present experience fits with all that.

In response, someone might defend Alston's position by arguing that it has become pretty widely accepted that even sense perception is theory laden; and hence, that the context dependency of which I've spoken does not differentiate religious from perceptual experience. But I'm not claiming that context dependency is the exclusive property of religious experience. I'm claiming that the context dependency of religious experience is much more extensive or encompassing than in the case of perception. Knowing that the vision one is having is of an angel involves a tangle of beliefs and religious feelings that does not compare with the background knowledge necessary for knowing that one is seeing a tamarisk. You don't have to be a botanist to learn to recognize tamarisks, but you do have to be religious to see angels. One can learn to recognize tamarisks by seeing pictures of them and studying botany but one cannot learn to recognize angels by seeing pictures of them and studying angelology.

Fourthly, by drawing on the analogous features between religious and perceptual experience, those types of religious experiences that are more like

perceptual experiences, e.g., visions, get more emphasis than they deserve. If we look at the sorts of religious experiences that are most often discussed by the 'urafa or mystics of Islam, we find that visions and such things play a relatively minor role, and what is much more prominent are what are called states (ahwal) and stations (maqamat). These are intrinsically connected with a course of moral improvement. James presents the moral improvements of the saints as though they were results, "fruits", of having mystical experiences that primarily consist in feelings of oneness with the universe or visions; but the stations of the Sufi are neither experiences nor simple results of religious experiences, even if the moral improvements and religious experiences accompany one another. If anything, the states and stations are seen as fruits of self-purification and spiritual wayfaring, rather than the other way around.

Finally, James and Alston try to seek out some justification for religious belief on the basis of religious experience. Religious experience ends up playing some sort of foundational role, subject to various qualifications and conditions. The experiences have authority, in James' phase, or the ability to provide justification to religious beliefs, at least for those who have them. Yet the mystics themselves did not seek to justify their basic religious outlook through their religious experiences, neither directly nor indirectly, in the way that James and Alston do. I don't think it would ever have occurred to them to do so. Particular beliefs may be justified for the mystic through religious experiences, and certainty may be gained about things previously believed, but this is a far cry from inferring the truth of the content of one's religious experiences and their presuppositions from the fact that they have occurred to one. The experiences themselves are not experienced as playing any such role.

Take, for example, the work by Ghazali to which James refers. Ghazali never tries to prove that God exists or that he is justified in believing that God exists because of religious experiences. That is not the way that he

experiences his religious experiences. Of course, he believes that information - or better, instruction - is to be gained from religious experience, but it is not like we find out that God or angels exist because of being instructed by them or experiencing some sort of union with them. When it comes to prophecy, Ghazali expresses some skepticism about relying on miracles to prove that Muhammad is a prophet of God, not because he doesn't believe in the miracles, but because he thinks that they are only a part of the evidence, and that the more important part of the evidence is to be accumulated by study of the Qur'an and hadiths and trying out the teachings. **«Convince yourself of that by trying out what he said about the influence of devotional practices on the purification of the heart - how truly he asserted that 'whoever lives out what he knows will receive from God what he does not know' how truly he asserted that 'if anyone aids an evildoer, God will give that man power over him' how truly he asserted that 'if a man rises up in the morning with but a single care (sc. to please God), God most high will preserve him from all cares in this world and the next'. When you have made trial of these in a thousand or several thousand instances, you will arrive at a necessary knowledge beyond all doubt»** (watt, 1959, p:67).

Ghazali goes on to speak of more direct access to certainty available to those much further advanced on the path, but the background of this cumulative case of tested spiritual guidance is presumed as a necessary step to direct tasting.

So, instead of criticizing James for making religious experience too different from sense experience, as Alston does, I would allow that religious experience is more different from sense experience than James thinks, let alone Alston. Furthermore, I think that the difference is amply reflected in Islamic writings on the subject, although I do not mean to claim that this is something peculiar about Islamic religious experience.

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