



Continuing The Heritage: William James, Alister Hardy and The Work of The Religious Experience Research Centre

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This article seeks to examine the relationships of the work on religious experience of the American psychologist and philosopher William James (1842-1910) and that of the marine biologist Professor Sir Alister Hardy FRS (1896-1985). It includes reference to James's dependence on the psychologist Edwin Starbuck (1866-1947) and what might be considered 'scientific' and multi-disciplinary in both their enterprises and that of Hardy. The main source of James's ideas in this area is the published version of his Edinburgh Gifford lectures *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). Hardy founded a unit for the study of religious experience (RERU) in Oxford in 1969 and described the first years of its research findings in *The Spiritual Nature of Man* (1979). Under later directors, researchers and lecturers the work extended into different methods and cultures. Since 2000 The Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre (RERC), has been based at University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter. (152 words)

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'The torch of learning passes from land to land as the spirit bloweth the flame'

(James 1909: 6)

A recent multi-authored and tightly focused volume entitled *William James and The Transatlantic Conversation* (Halliwell and Rasmussen eds. 2014) flags in its very title just how important has been the influence of William James and his ideas across the UK / USA boundary. Two significant events when James was in UK immediately spring to mind: the giving of the 2001/2 lectures at Old College, University of Edinburgh entitled *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, the text of which has been frequently re-published and the 1908 Hibbert lectures given at the Unitarian linked foundation Manchester (now Harris Manchester) College, Oxford, published in 1909 as *A Pluralistic Universe*. The whole of the second half of the 2014 volume mentioned above focuses on this latter work which ranges much more broadly than the study of religious experience.

James was himself not only an international but an interdisciplinary thinker, working particularly but not exclusively across the boundaries of psychology and philosophy. A Harvard University Press publicity flyer advertising Charles Taylor's *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* refers to William James as a sociologist, too. James also intended to cross the boundaries between religious traditions in his examination of religious experience, though in the end his lectures and the

subsequent volume on religious experience are often criticised as quite Protestant Christian and with that individualistic. That is more because of the weighting of the material he accessed from Starbuck's research than his own use of secondary textual sources. But that the reception of his work has been extensive across the study of religions as well as philosophy and theology is indicated by the contributions in the recent volume mentioned above, and its bibliography demonstrates just how rich has been the publishing on James. Another multi-authored work, which resulted from the papers given at the centenary conference in Edinburgh marking the Gifford lectures, focuses on James's subsequent text and elaborates his multi-disciplinary importance in its abstract which states:

William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* was an intellectual landmark, paving the way for current study of psychology, philosophy and religious studies. In this new companion to the Varieties, key international experts provide contemporary responses to James's book, exploring its seminal historical importance and its modern significance. Locating the Varieties within the context of James's other works and exploring James's views on psychology, mysticism, religious experience, emotion and truth, the sixteen articles offer new analyses of the Varieties from the perspectives of postcolonial theory, history, social theory and philosophy. As the only critical work dedicated to the cross-disciplinary influence of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, this book testifies to William James's genius and ongoing legacy. (Carrette ed. 2005)

The volume includes essays by an appropriately diverse range of scholars including the editor Jeremy Carrette, Eugene Taylor, Sonu Shamdasani, David Wulff, Jacob A. Belzen, Grace M. Jantzen, Richard King, Robert Segal, G. William Barnard, Ruth Anna Putnam, Richard Gale, Hilary Putnam, and Graham Bird.

But for the present author, one strand / dimension of James's influence is missing from the 2005 Carrette edited volume. The link with James and its influence on, connections with and inheritance through the initial work of Professor Sir Alister Hardy FRS and the research unit / centre which he founded in Oxford in 1969 was ignored, as it seemed not to fit in with the ideological analyses of the rest of the contributors as diverse as they are. A guess is that the unit / centre's profile might have been seen to be too confessional and 'theological', with an agenda of assuming the authenticity of experiences and even wanting to prove a common core rather than exercising enough rigorous critical distance and hermeneutical suspicion. This perception is not without evidence, most starkly in the launch by Robert Runcie, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, in an appeal for the work of The Alister Hardy Centre, as it was then called, in 1990 and quoted in the Introduction to the research on contemporary China.

If it can be shown that there is a 'common core' or 'ultimate sameness' to all religious experience, irrespective of creed, race or society, this would have profound implications for the evolution of common understanding across many of the current barriers which divide people in our world (Yao and Badham n/d: vii)

But this is certainly not any longer the whole story, or even a driving part of it. Since the present author became RERC Director in 1996 she, and the scholars she involved in the enterprise and those who have continued since, have worked on a broader academic profile for the Centre. She has been a champion of non-confessional religious studies since 1967 and the founding of the new Lancaster Department. Also the variety of voices RERC has embraced over the years rather challenges a narrow view of the agenda. So the core of this article re-visits the

author's original 2001 conference input and focuses on the particular link between James and Hardy amongst the many that have been made and continue to be made by others. That the link is important there can be no doubt. David Hay, in his recent 2011 biography of Alister Hardy *God's Biologist* states that in his work 'Alister turned especially to William James's masterpiece *The Varieties of Religious Experience*' but that 'What interested Hardy was the pioneering empirical research conducted by James's doctoral student, Edwin Starbuck. James himself did no empirical research, but relied on Starbuck's investigations for many of his examples'. (Hay 2011: 226).

No historical figure emerges out of a vacuum and whether or not authors are self-conscious about their own roots and declare their perspectives, much research goes into tracing influences and analysing the effects and impact of key works and their authors on others. Having indicated with the references in my first paragraphs two examples of just how rich is the literature on James and the reception of his ideas and work, to which list should be added Jeremy Carette's *William James's Hidden Religious Imagination*, the main focus of this article is narrower / more tightly focused than these volumes. As already stated, it looks at the relationship between the work of the marine biologist Professor Sir Alister Hardy FRS on religious experience which was begun formerly in 1969 with the establishment of the Religious Experience Research Unit at Manchester College, Oxford (now Harris Manchester College) and the work of William James on this topic and surveys some of the subsequent expansion of work the Unit, now Centre has supported. Hardy intended his research to be 'scientific', experiential and empirical but as indicated above James had made it obvious that he himself did not do empirical research in this area but that his work (and therefore some of Hardy's) builds on that done by his doctoral student Edwin Diller Starbuck (1866-1947), who, as a young research student at Harvard, pioneered the systematic, some would say scientific, study of religious experience by devising and circulating a questionnaire asking people to describe their conversions. Eric Sharpe notes that Starbuck 'appears to have made the first successful use of the questionnaire method of doing research', a method which later flowed into some of the subsequent research by RERU / RERC (Sharpe 1986: 106f). In 1894, the pioneering Joseph Estlin Carpenter, then vice-principal and later principal of Manchester College, Oxford spent a sabbatical year as a chaplain in the Harvard Divinity School at the time when Starbuck was doing his fieldwork for his PhD. Starbuck gave Carpenter some of the questionnaires to take back for staff and students at Manchester College and as far as we know these were the only input from outside New England, though how many were returned to Starbuck and which are included in Starbuck's analysis and James's final discussion is not known (Hay 1990: 3-4 and 2011: 226-227).

But this important trans-atlantic connection in the exchange of questionnaires, possible because of the existing Unitarian links between Manchester College and Harvard, needs to be noted, though Hay points out that '*Hardy was unaware of this coincidence*' (ibid.) and neither James nor Starbuck were themselves Unitarians. Methodologically Sharpe notes that Starbuck emphasised that 'The central guiding principle was that the study must deal *primarily with the first hand experience of individuals*, not so much with their *theories* about religion as with their actual *experiences*.....One must catch at first hand the feelings of spirituality' (op. cit :106ff).

The use of the term spirituality is notable here as it was, with the adjective spiritual, the one chosen by Alister Hardy in his account of the first years of the Unit's workin

1979 *The Spiritual Nature of Man*. These terms, spiritual and spirituality, have now become widely used for this area of exploration, distinguishing spirituality, being spiritual, from religion and being religious or a member of a religious tradition. This is important for many people who want to distance themselves from membership of organised religions and their belief systems. But the use of this term as a positive rallying call has also been controversial as is indicated in the title *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (Carette and King 2005b passim). The emerita Professor of Philosophy in the University of Delhi, Margaret Chatterjee, has also written critically on the use and meaning of this term across cultures in her 1989 *The Concept of Spirituality*. She was for a few years in the 1990s working at Westminster College, Oxford (now Brookes University) when the Centre was based there and she was involved with its work. Another significant term in the above quotation from Starbuck is 'feeling' which in English is bound to evoke Friedrich Schleiermacher's famous and influential definition of religion in his 1799 *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* as 'the feeling of absolute dependence'.

The sense of links and intellectual heritage is re-enforced when we know that Starbuck was familiar with the work of the important Oxford figure Friedrich Max Müller, for example his *Lectures on The Science of Religion*. References to 'science' can, of course, in these contexts, almost always be misleading and in neither the case of Starbuck nor Müller can their work be seen as a 'scientific', 'empirical' enterprise without further qualification on the meaning of these terms. Starbuck, like James, is a pragmatist (James [1902] 1977:493). Peter Donovan, the New Zealand philosopher of religion emphasized this point in his *Interpreting Religious Experience* and in a talk given to a meeting of the Alister Hardy Society at Westminster College, Oxford on 7th September 1994. At that time Donovan was in Oxford on an academic exchange with Peggy Morgan, who was later to become RERC Director. On that occasion he calls James's position epistemological pragmatism, being interested in what makes a practical difference to human life, something that James also emphasised in his use of the idea of 'fruits' of the religious life and in the phrase 'God is real since he produces real effects' (James, [1902] 1977: 491). This emphasis also interested Hardy as can be seen from section 12 of his initial typology of accounts called the consequences of experiences. (Hardy, 1979: 29). Müller sees 'being scientific' as collecting, classifying and comparing material, in his case mainly the sacred texts of religious tradition and this is also very much how his contemporary Victorian botanists and zoologists and the early anthropologists went about their work.

As always, once one begins to explore a web of connections, it is difficult not to draw on/mention the thinking of even earlier figures such as the poet William Wordsworth, a favourite of both James and Hardy. Hay mentions that the influence of Wordsworth helped James through periods of depression (Hay, 2011:180). Hardy chose to take a copy of the 1805 edition MSS given to Coleridge of Wordsworth's *Prelude* in addition to The Bible and Shakespeare when he was interviewed on Desert Island Discs on 27th October 1973. Mention should also be made of the novelist George Eliot (Marian or Mary Anne Evans) whose *Mill on The Floss* (1860) was James's favourite English novel. These literary connections are explored in Carette's 2013 study of James already mentioned. And Eliot herself had not only translated the controversial Ludwig Feuerbach and David Friedrich Strauss but focuses, with what resonates with James's own emphasis, in the description of Dorothea at the end of *Middlemarch* on

'the particulars of life'. (James, 1909: 331). Researching the area of religious experience also brings in links with the German thinker credited as the founder both of modern theology and the study of religions, Friedrich Schleiermacher, with his influential definition of religion already quoted 'the feeling of absolute dependence' and of the pioneering Rudolf Otto whose example and influence in *The Idea of the Holy* Hardy acknowledges in *The Divine Flame* (Hay, 2011:220)

But to return once more from this reference to cultural and intellectual breadth to the particular and initial narrower focus of this article, the continuities and discontinuities both in content and method between the work of William James and the work begun by Alister Hardy. That Hardy intended his work on religious experience to be continuous with and extend the research and emphases in James's *Varieties* is made quite explicit by Hardy. In the second volume of his own Aberdeen Gifford lectures (1964 and 1965), published as *The Divine Flame* in 1966 Hardy says:

'Just as their work (James and Starbuck) sprang from the consideration of a large collection of records of experience from a great variety of people, so must our studies be based upon the analysis of similar collections' ([1966] 1978: 103)

In the introduction to a scrapbook put together as a record of the early years of the Unit and now held in the archives of the Religious Experience Research Centre, he writes:

Our work is indeed attempting to follow very humbly in the footsteps of those two great leaders in the study of religious experience: William James, who published the Gifford Lectures *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1902 and Edwin Starbuck who published his *Psychology of Religion* in 1899. These were the great pioneers, but they were not followed by others, except by the social anthropologists who went out and lived with the various primitive peoples they were studying and so got to know their ways of thinking and feeling and gave some remarkable accounts of their religious experience...What we are doing in our Unit is really an anthropological study of the religious feelings of Modern Western man (sic), but hoping later to extend it to eastern cultures.

In a memorandum to the Governors of Manchester College in 1966, in which he suggested a research unit for the study of religious experience and human personality, Hardy mentions even more of the breadth he envisaged.

The following are a few examples of the kind of studies I would like to be undertaken

1. An extension and development of those pioneering studies by Professor E.D.Starbuck (*Psychology of Religion* 1899) and by William James (*Varieties of Religious Experience* 1902). These classics have never been added to in the same spirit in which they were undertaken; and they were confined to studies of people (mainly university students) of a particular protestant Christian community. As James says regarding Starbuck's work "The enquiry ought to be extended to other lands and to populations of other faiths".
- 2.The development of more social studies such as those of Michael Argyle (in his *Religious Behaviour*, 1958).
3. Surveys and analyses by questionnaire of other mystical experience among different populations – on the lines of the agnostic author M Laski in her *Ecstasy: A Study of Some Secular and Religious Experiences*.
4. Psychological studies like those made by Sir Cyril Burt into the nature of value (*Psychology of Value*, British. Journal. Stat. Psychology. Vol XV1 pp. 59-104, 1963).

5. Studies on telepathy and allied phenomena e.g. Oliver Lodge and Gilbert Murray.

So Hardy intends to be inter-disciplinary in his approach to this wide field, as wide a field as the study of religions itself, and to include experiences that might or might not be deemed as explicitly religious in a conventional sense, which can take us back to the term spiritual. The inter-disciplinary nature of the enterprise provides clearer continuity with James than with any of the other more focused scholars. This inter-disciplinary aspect to James's work is flagged despite James's disclaimer on his own expertise.

'I am neither a theologian, nor a scholar learned in the history of religions, nor an anthropologist. Psychology is the only branch of learning in which I am particularly versed'. (James, [1902] 1977: 26)

It is not difficult from James's biography to add philosophy and medicine as well as sociology, as suggested earlier, to these. The use of his text in, for example, the study of mystics and mysticism and in other fields challenges his modesty and self-limitation here. Hardy's personal background is in marine biology and zoology and he held chairs in both Natural History and Zoology. There is also in Plymouth a large oceanography unit called The Alister Hardy Foundation for Ocean Science (SAHFOS), which still uses the continuous plankton recorder he designed. This background brings authority to his wish and claim that he plans to be 'scientific', the use of a term on which initial comment has already been made, and to which consideration of his text adds the term 'experimental' and 'experiential'.

The explanation of what Hardy means by experimental is given by quoting from the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* 'based on experience not on authority or conjecture' and he continues

This being so, would it not be better, some would say, to speak of an experimental faith so as to avoid confusion with the scientific meaning? My answer is "No" because the faith I am thinking of would be one based not only on general experience but on one which in part is like that described in the first meaning given in the same dictionary to the word "experiment", i.e. a test, trial or procedure adopted on the chance of its succeeding. (Hardy, 1979: 139).

Hardy says that he has been interested in religious experience since he was a young man, but had been discouraged later by the scientist Professor Garstang, his father-in-law, from being seen to have anything to do with religion until he had made his reputation as a scientist (Franklin, 2006: 2). Both James and Hardy can be seen, as indicated above, as scientific pragmatists working against a background of scientific reductionism and moving into the study of religions. I shall return again to what 'being scientific' means in the context of RERC's research. There are, of course, other differences as well as links in the disciplines that seem important to James and Hardy which arise out of their differing historical contexts. Hardy's attitude to anthropologists, many of whom were his friends in Oxford, is more positive than that of James. In his *Introduction* to the 1977 Fount Edition of *Varieties* Arthur Darby Nock quotes from James's letters which refer to the works of the anthropologists J.G. Frazer and E.B. Tylor.

He (Frazer), after Tylor, is the greatest authority now in England on the religious ideas and

superstitions of primitive peoples and he knows nothing of psychical research and thinks that the trances etc. of savage soothsayers, oracles and the like, are all *feigned!* Verily science is amusing! ([1902] 1977: 19)

By Hardy's time, particularly in Oxford, anthropologists and anthropology had 'moved on' from the now deemed inadequacies in research methods and attitudes of these earlier figures and Hardy has a very positive section on social anthropologists in *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, his survey of the first years of the Unit's work. These are the people, he says, who followed up, sixty years or so later, the earlier pioneering work of James, Starbuck, Leuba and writers on mysticism such as Underhill.

For years, anthropologists have been collecting accounts of religious attitudes, ideas and feelings from primitive peoples. As a result we know much more about the religious feelings of Polynesians, North American Indians, and various tribes in Africa than we do about those of our citizens in Western Society. (Hardy, [1979], 1997: 5-7)

James's desire had been (see note 1 from the memorandum quoted above) for the study to be extended further than the New England community Starbuck researched, and Hardy sees that breadth as already being explored by the anthropologists. Hardy indicates that the current need in UK is to look at the more local phenomena. The anthropologists' work from which he quotes are R.R. Marett, Emile Durkheim, Edward Evans Pritchard and Godfrey Lienhardt. A quotation from Marett (Hardy 1979: 6) includes the language of 'power' which seems to have influenced what has come to be called 'The Hardy Question' 'Have you ever been conscious of or influenced by a power, whether you call it God or not?' which much later formed the basis for the development of the research in China to which we shall return. The passage from Durkheim which Hardy quotes counters the reductionist emphasis which is sometimes given to Durkheim's work. It affirms that the religious believer is stronger in the face of the miseries of the world and also shows that Durkheim considers James an 'apologist', used here positively but a term which some might use negatively of the work of RERU / RERC. Durkheim says that:

The believer who has communicated with his god is not merely a man who sees new truths of which the unbeliever is ignorant; he is a man who is stronger. He feels within him more force, either to endure the trials of existence or to conquer them. It is as though he were raised above the miseries of the world because he is raised above his condition as a mere man; he believes that he is saved from evil, under whatever form he may conceive this evil.

Our entire study rests upon this postulate that the unanimous sentiment of the believers of all times cannot be purely illusory. Together with a recent apologist of the faith (William James) we admit that these religious beliefs rest upon a specific experience whose demonstrative value is, in one sense, not one bit inferior to that in scientific experiments, though different from them. (Durkheim quoted in Hardy *ibid.*)

As well as their references, both negative and positive, to the work of anthropologists, the other resource for both James's and Hardy's work is the body of literary studies: autobiographies, journals and the writings of mystics, which they both use with little if any contextual analysis.

On Being Scientific

James says:

Religious Experience, in other words, spontaneously and inevitably engenders myths, superstitions, dogmas, creeds and metaphysical theologies, and criticism of one set of these by the adherents of another. Of late impartial classifications and comparisons have become possible, alongside the denunciations and anathemas by which the commerce between creeds and exclusivity used exclusively to be carried on. We have the beginnings of a 'Science of Religions' so called; and if these lectures could ever be accounted a crumb-like contribution to such a science, I should be made very happy. (James [1902] 1977:416).

Particularly the terms 'classification' and 'comparison' echo Müller's emphasis in his *Introduction to The Science of Religion* that it is in collecting, which both James and Hardy do with their material, classifying and comparing that one is being 'scientific'. So the meaning of the term science in this context indicates an approach which is systematic and pays accurate/careful attention to the evidence, whether that is textual, based on questionnaires, first-hand autobiographical accounts or anthropological surveys. It can also, as used by other thinkers such as Durkheim in his *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, indicate an emphasis on being rational and objective, appealing to reason rather than revelation and faith for holding or demonstrating a position. The use of the term experimental by both James and Hardy means the experience of the evidence, something more like evidential, a term used later by Carolyn Franks Davis in her wide-ranging research, *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience*. Its main characteristic in Hardy's case had more in common with the science of collecting butterflies and beetles than laboratory analysis of atomic structures and chemical compounds. As the psychologist Michael Argyle, who was closely linked with the Centre for many years, points out. 'Hardy adopted a non-ontological approach, in seeking to collect and classify religious experiences as if they were specimens of plants and animals. (Argyle 1997:1).

And it may have been because of his work on plant taxonomy in Africa and at Kew Gardens that Edward Robinson was invited to join RERU and become at first assistant to Hardy and then the second Director. But Robinson often differed from Hardy's emphasis and later says:

Science belongs to the realm of the problematic and should not aspire to be more –it is the art of the soluble and mysteries are of a different order altogether' (1977: 5) and 'collecting records is playing the part of naturalists, not scientists (ibid. 11).

And whilst acknowledging taxonomy in the following words

Taxonomy, then, is the bass of all scientific observation. The qualities required in a good taxonomist – breadth of imagination as well as subtlety in discrimination – are those needed for any scientific project to break new ground, whatever its field. But human experience – can there ever be a taxonomy of that?

The quick answer is, yes, of course; what else are the psychologist, the sociologist or the anthropologist doing but classifying, naming, comparing and relating the different types of human behaviours, individual, social or cultural (Robinson, 1978: 2).

Robinson also wants to acknowledge the mysterious nature of scientific discovery and the need for an acknowledgement of the paradoxical (1978 passim)

Going back to Hardy's view, he comments:

Our objective study of a large number of written personal accounts....while it does not as

yet constitute a contribution to *science* in the strict sense, this is coming, though it can never, of course, be a science of the inner essence of spirituality, but a quantitative, sociological survey of man's behaviors and reactions in relation to his experience of this inner awareness. (Hardy [1979] 1997:16)

But in addition Hardy's understanding of being scientific and bringing his skills as a particular sort of scientist to bear on his study of religious experience is that of a man with a very imaginative approach to his work. In *Fish and Fisheries*, one of his early scientific works, he says:

Too often the scientist is afraid of giving any indication that there is something really exciting about what he is trying to discover; with what he thinks is appropriate modesty he likes to make it appear just a routine daily job – sometimes quite unromantic.....he forgets that he himself, if he is a real scientist, has the passion of the investigator which is rather like that of the artist. (Hardy 1959: 301)

Hardy speaks here with the insight of a person who was a talented artist. Examples of his work are on display in Lampeter and are published in *A Cotswold Sketchbook*. The ideas of Hardy and Edward Robinson, the second Director of the Unit, of what constituted good art did vary, though. Robinson had a considerable public standing both as a sculptor and interpreter of spirituality and the arts, as his publications *The Language of Mystery* and *Icons of The Present* and key exhibitions before his death in both Exeter Cathedral and St Margaret's Church, Westminster called *Forms of Silence* demonstrated. The place of experience, imagination and passion in the scientific quest has been explored in at least two Alister Hardy Memorial Lectures, for example that in 1998 by the plant ecologist and theologian Reverend Professor John Rodwell entitled *The Experience of Passion in Creation*. Rodwell speaks of 'real poetry' and 'wonder' and 'amazement, along with methodological integrity and that relentless curiosity which are the hallmarks of a true scientist'. In 2000 the historian of science John Hedley Brooke, at that time the Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion and Director of The Ian Ramsey Centre at Harris Manchester College, Oxford, the college where RERC began, called his lecture *Can Scientific Discovery Be A Religious Experience?* Brooke in conversation pointed out that what we should always talk about in any case is sciences and religions, since the relationships and challenges between them depend on which sciences and which religions are being considered. James certainly affirmed the place of imagination and he also affirmed the place of the arts in his empathetic study of the phenomena of religious experience, in this case of phenomena which claim no special religious significance. This area is pursued in Jeremy Carette's latest book already mentioned *William James's Hidden Religious Imagination* which highlights James's sense of the 'unseen' and 'more'. One example from James is in the following passage where he significantly uses 'we':

Single words, and conjunctions of words, effects of light on land and sea, odors and musical sounds.....Most of us can remember the strangely moving power of passages in certain poems read when we were young, irrational doorways as they were through which the mystery of fact, the wildness and the pang of life, stole into our hearts and thrilled them....we are alive or dead to the eternal inner message of the arts according as we kept or lost this mystical susceptibility. ([1902] 1977: 369)

Religion and Religions

In Oxford Hardy could be seen as part of a tradition of interest in a variety of religions that is linked with Estlin Carpenter (Manchester College), Andrew Fairbairn (Mansfield College), and with Friedrich Max Müller for whom the study of religions can also be claimed to be plural as well as 'scientific' in the way indicated above in the quotation from James on page ?? . James sees his investigations as linked with the work of these men in some sense, too, though in his final chapter he also acknowledges that on the basis of the range of material gathered the conclusions 'are as likely to be adverse as they are to be favorable to the claim that the essence of religion is true in such a science'.

Both James and Hardy's understanding of religion is personal. James's famous definition is often quoted.

'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] 1977: 50.

Hardy says

'By religion, I do not mean institutional religion or the theological dogmas of any particular faith. I am concerned with it as a basic preoccupation of man'. (Hardy 1975: 13)

And

Religion, this feeling of contact with a Greater Power beyond the self seems to be some fundamental feature in the natural history of man.

The main characteristics of man's religious and spiritual experiences are shown in his feelings for a transcendent reality which frequently manifests themselves in early childhood; a feeling that 'Something Other' than the self can actually be sensed. (Hardy [1979] 1997 :131).

He sees religion in temporary decline, but says:

I say temporary because I believe the dogmas on both sides may be revised as theology becomes more natural and science's mechanistic interpretation of life is shown not to be the whole truth.

Religion indeed seems to be some fundamental feature in Man's make-up: something which can be as powerful as any other urge.....

It would not surprise me if the roots of religion went deeper down into biological history than is generally conceded and that it is part of the very nature of the living stream. (Hardy 1965: 274)

One of the notable things about James's *Varieties* is the use of quotations of original accounts of experience from a wide variety of cases. This makes the book both a very readable and rich resource. Hardy's *Spiritual Nature of Man* also brings the subject matter to life right from the beginning with its many quotations and an opening, attention catching account from those that had been so far collected.

It can be both asserted and contested that any investigation of a subject such as religious experience and indeed of any religion needs insider participation for understanding to be adequate. Those such as phenomenologists and anthropologists and sociologists who use the methods of participant observation would contest this but through their methods try to make the insider subjects of study speak with their own authentic voices. The use of extensive quotations by both James and Hardy certainly does this. One can see both William James and Rudolf

Otto as phenomenologists in the 'soft' non-Husserlian sense. But both James and Hardy had also personally experienced some of the states that they were writing about. Since the range of experiences they cover are extensive, we cannot suggest that they experienced them all, but there certainly is first hand material behind their work. The interest and inner authority which both men had in researching religious experience, in exploring a natural theology, what Hardy calls being a naturalist of the numinous is certainly rooted in personal religious experiences which each of them had had. James writes in his letters, edited by his son Henry, of a happy experience of his own in the Adirondack Mountains in 1898, at the time he was preparing for the Edinburgh lectures.

The streaming moonlight lit up things in a magical checkered play, and it seemed as if the Gods of all the nature-mythologies were holding an indescribable meeting in my breasts with the moral `gods of the inner life...the intense significance of some sort of the whole scene, if one could only tell the significance; the intense appeal of it; in point of fact, I can't find a single word for all that significance, and don't know what it was significant of, so there it remains, a mere boulder of impression. Doubtless in more ways than one, though, things in the Edinburgh lectures will be traceable to it.
(James, W. 1920: 76-77)

Very different and in the spectrum of those who are sick souls and inclined to melancholy but of whose capacity for spiritual experience James is so positive, is the account in *Varieties* which is now acknowledged, thanks to his son as his own (James, H. 1946 1:45 quoted in Moore, 1966.).

Whilst in this state of philosophical pessimism and general depression of spirits about my prospects, I went one evening into a dressing-room in the twilight to procure some article that was there; when suddenly there fell upon me without any warning, just as if it came out of the darkness, a horrible fear of my own existence. Simultaneously there arose in my mind the image of an epileptic patient whom I had seen in the asylum, a black-haired youth with greenish skin, entirely idiotic, who used to sit all day on one of the benches, or rather shelves against the wall, with his knees drawn up against his chin, and the coarse grey undershirt, which was his only garment, drawn over them inclosing his entire figure. He sat there like a sort of sculptured Egyptian cat or Peruvian mummy, moving nothing but his black eyes and looking absolutely non-human. This image and my fear entered into a species of combination with each other. *That shape am I*, I felt, potentially. Nothing that I possess can defend me against that fate, if the hour for it should strike for me as it struck for him. There was such a horror of him, and such a perception of my own merely momentary discrepancy from him, that it was as if something hitherto solid within my breast gave way entirely, and I became a mass of quivering fear. After this the universe was changed for me altogether. I awoke morning after morning with a horrible dread at the pit of my stomach, and with a sense of the insecurity of life that I never knew before, and that I have never felt since. It was like a revelation; and although the immediate feelings passed away, the experience has made me sympathetic with the morbid feelings of others ever since. It gradually faded but for months I was not able to go out into the dark alone.

In general I dreaded to be left alone. I remember wondering how other people could live, how I myself had ever lived so unconscious of that pit of insecurity beneath the surface of life. My mother in particular, a very cheerful person, seemed to me a perfect paradox in her unconsciousness of danger, which you may well believe I was very careful not to disturb by revelations of my own state of mind. I have always thought that this experience of melancholia of mine had a religious bearing. (James, [1902], 1977 pp.166-167)

The dramatic difference in the accounts need not surprise us when we know something of the James's family history of bi-polar disorder, well documented, along with other cases, by Kay Redfield Jamison's study *Touched With Fire: Manic-*

depressive illness and the artistic temperament (1993: 210).

The accounts we have of Hardy's experience and people's general impression of him show a more consistently cheerful temperament, what Hay refers to as his 'sunny nature' (Hay, 2011: 62). From being absorbed in the natural world of beetles and flowers since childhood, he had a strong sense of a power or 'Something' which profoundly influenced him. David Hay quotes from Hardy's unpublished autobiography about his schooldays at Oundle.

There was a little lane leading off the Northampton Road to Park Wood as it was called, and it was a haven for the different kinds of brown butterflies. I had never seen so many all together. The common meadow Brown, of course, were everywhere in the field but here also were the Lesser meadow Brown or gatekeeper, the Wall Brown and Marble White, which belongs to the same family. As one approached the wood, there was a small covered reservoir with grass banks leading over it and this was always the home of many Ringlet butterflies, of which I seem to remember there were two forms recognized as a variety. I specially liked walking along the banks of various streams watching, as the summer developed, the sequence of wild flowers growing along their brims. I was attracted by several streams lying in different directions from Oundle. I wandered along their banks, at times almost with a feeling of ecstasy. There is no doubt that as a boy I was becoming what might be described as a nature mystic. Somehow I felt the presence of something that was beyond and yet in a way part of all the things that thrilled me—the wildflowers, and indeed the insects too. I will now record something which I have never told anyone before, but now that I am in my 88th year I think I can admit it. Just occasionally when I was sure that no one could see me, I became so overcome with the glory of the natural scene, that for a moment or two I fell on my knees in prayer – not prayer asking for anything, but thanking God, who felt very real to me, for the glories of his Kingdom and for allowing me to feel them. It was always by the running waterside that I did this, perhaps in front of a great foam of meadowsweet or purple loosestrife (Hay, 1998: 43).

But it seems that was not all there was in Hardy's background. Hay qualifies the 'sunny nature' image and refers to his 'state of depression' which lay hidden below his excitement at coming to Oxford', the source of which was 'the clash between evolutionary theory and religion that already begun to make him feel uneasy while he was at Oundle' (Hay, 2011:55). And his trips to the Cotswolds with his bicycle were to counter any stress.

Both James and Hardy, perhaps on the basis of the authority of these experiences, saw religious experience and religion as *sui generis*, a biological reality and not altogether culturally and linguistically conditioned, though their articulation might be. Both men saw the material they were working with as a witness to the truth (James [1902] 1977: 438). It can be suggested that both men talked about an essence, despite in other ways presenting diversity and variety. But this is also debatable and Carette asserts 'there is no one definition of religion in James, only a plurality of applications and associations in the relational-perceptual field' (Carette, 2013: 70) Hardy says at the end of *The Spiritual Nature of Man* (1979: 141)

I have recalled enough examples from earlier pages to illustrate what I believe to be the main characteristics of man's religious feelings, notably transcendental reality, early childhood manifestations, a sense of presence, personalization and the phenomenon of prayer. How similar are these conclusions to those of that great pioneer and master, William James? In the concluding chapter of *Varieties* he writes:

Summing up in the broadest possible way the characteristics of the religious life, as we have found them it includes the following beliefs

1. That the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it

draws its chief significance.

2. That union or harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end;
3. That prayer or inner communion with the spirit thereof – be that spirit ‘God’ or ‘law’ – is a process wherein work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects, psychological or material, within the phenomenal world.

Religion includes also the following psychological characteristics:-

4. A new zest which adds itself like a gift to life, and takes the form either of lyrical enchantment or of appeal to earnestness and heroism.
5. An assurance of safety and temper of peace, and in relation to others, a preponderance of loving affections.

I think the reader will recognize that James’s summary of what he regards as the main characteristics of a man’s religious life, based, as is ours, upon records of experience, is indeed similar to our own. Are my conclusions coloured by having read first those of James? In the whole of this book, as well as in the foregoing brief discussion, I have been drawing particularly on the findings of my colleagues. I believe that there can be little doubt that the results of our research do confirm the views put forward by James three quarters of a century ago. In my first chapter I put forward the brilliant innovation of this pioneering work of James and Starbuck, and said how we were humbly following in their footsteps; It is now most gratifying to find that our work fits so well on to the foundations they laid. Does this mean that our task is accomplished, that there is no more for us to do? Far from it.

But Hardy does not quote James’s later description, which some may suggest sounds ‘essential’:

The warring gods and formulas of the varied religions do indeed cancel each other, but there is a certain uniform deliverance in which all religions appear to meet. It consists of two parts:-

1. An uneasiness; and
 2. Its solution.
1. The uneasiness reduced to its simplest terms, is a sense that there is *something wrong about us* as we naturally stand.
 2. The solution is a sense that *we are saved from this wrongness* by making proper connection with the higher powers.

James continues with the following description of ‘the essence of their religious experience’ and that

It seems to me that all the phenomena are accurately describable in these very simple general terms. They allow for the divided self and the struggle; they involve the change of personal center and the surrender of the lower self; they express the appearance of exteriority of the helping power and yet account for our sense of union with it; and they fully justify our feelings of security and joy. There is probably no autobiographical document, among all those which I have quoted, to which the description will not well apply’. His doorway into the material and the issues he sees as the best for a ‘science of religions’ whilst acknowledging the divisive and strongly adhered to ‘overviews of different theologies.

He talks of ‘an impartial science of religions’ which ‘might sift out from the midst of discrepancies a common body of doctrine which she might also formulate in terms to which physical science need not object’. (James [1902] 1977: 484ff)

More to Do

An increased and increasing breadth to the work begun by James and Hardy can be identified in subsequent research and publishing linked with the Research Centre which Hardy founded, as well as beyond. Investigation of the categories, including criticisms of terminology beyond Christianity and into a variety of religious traditions and cultures has resulted in a rich menu of occasional papers, many based on lectures given under the auspices of the Religious Experience Research Centre and drawing in a wide range of scholars and methods, both insiders and outsiders, as I suggest James and Hardy intended. I have space to mention only a few examples I particular in respect of the 'other lands and the populations of other faiths' as quoted in Hardy's 1966 memorandum quoted earlier.

Richard Gombrich, at that time Boden Professor of Sanskrit in the University of Oxford, in his *Religious Experience in Early Buddhism?* the published version of his 1997 annual lecture for the British Association for The Study of Religions, when the theme of the whole conference in Oxford was religious experience, as was a later conference in Edinburgh, writes:

When we attempt to study religious experience the founder and patron saint of our studies must surely be William James, and I make no apology for taking his great book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* as the basis of my exposition of that topic. (Gombrich, 1997:1)

His conclusions are more challenging:

Firstly while I agree with James that experience is "the real backbone of the world's religious life", or at least its basis, I think that all experience is to a greater or lesser extent ineffable, and that mystical experience is not a special category characterized by ineffability, but simply a strong case of it.

Secondly James was too sanguine about the possibility of finding religious experience in its pure personal form, uncontaminated by social pressures, because he confused experience with its interpretation.

Thirdly, that the Pali texts concerned with the earliest recorded Buddhist experiences refer to a great variety of experiences which are considered religious because of their context, a context set by the Buddha's teachings and experiences.

Finally, that this suggests that a religious experience may usefully be viewed as a type of experience, like an erotic experience or a tragic experience or an hallucinatory experience, but rather as a way of experiencing one's experiences, a way which will involve attaching considerable significance to them, and that this reaction is likely to have been learned. (Gombrich 1997: 18)

Professor Chakravarti Ram Prasad has analysed *Religious Experience in Hindu Traditions in (occasional paper 26)*; Dr Maya Warrier *Devotion to A Goddess in Contemporary India in (no. 40)*. Dr Mukti Barton focused on Christian and Muslim Women in Bangladesh in her *Liberation Spirituality as a Signal of Transcendence* (paper no. 18). Dr Cafer Yaran explored *Muslim Religious Experiences* (paper 41) as had Dr Ron Geaves in *Religious Experience in Islam* (paper 29) and Professor Muhammad Shaker more specifically wrote on *Spirituality and Prayer in Shiite Islam* (no. 42).

Analyses of childhood experience, begun by Edward Robinson from the archives and published as *The Original Vision* have been continued in the original three year research project completed by Rebecca Nye with David Hay and published initially in

1998 as *The Spirit of The Child*. This area of investigation has been particularly important in UK because of the statutory place of Religious Education in schools. Attention to the social dimension of religious experience in response to the criticism that earlier definitions and research, especially in Starbuck and James, were very focused on the individual, has been provided by the Oxford sociologist Dr. Bryan Wilson in his 1996 occasional paper *Religious Experience: A Sociological Perspective*. The wider worldview analysis has been given by another sociologist Dr Anne Eyre, who has written in 1997 on *Football as Religious Experience: Sociological Reflections*.

In the original 3,000 collection of accounts of experience by far the majority were from women, but researched mainly by men. So Lene Sjørup's has highlighted women's experiences from qualitative interviews and from the RERC archives in her publication *Enhed med Altet*, translated from the Danish as *Oneness: A Theology of Women's Religious Experiences* and in her occasional paper no. 30 *Mysticism and Gender*. Professor Keith Ward's Alister Hardy Memorial lecture in 2004 revisits the question *Is There A Core of Religious Experience?* In this case with reference to Christianity and Vedanta and argues in his case and controversially for many, that there are 'a range of core experiences that are recognizable similar beneath many doctrinal traditions' (Ward, 2005:1).

Hardy's legacy of 'hoping later to extend it to Eastern cultures' (1979: 5) has been fulfilled not only in some of the lectures and occasional papers only a few of which are mentioned above, but also in a research project on religious experience amongst the Han Chinese which was conducted by a large team of mainly Chinese scholars and covered a large geographical area of China. It took four years and was dependent on a grant from the Templeton Foundation where there is continuity with the fact that Alister Hardy was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion just before he died in 1985. The China project as with others listed above provides new material, and was launched at the 2007 British Association for the Study of Religions conference called Religious Experience in Global Contexts when some of the Chinese researchers presented their findings. The work is published as *Religious Experience in Contemporary China* by Xinzhong Yao and Paul Badham. As is encouraged in the Centre's work, there was lively critical discussion about the limitation of the research to Han Chinese, research methods used and the conclusions reached.

But in addition to much new material which has been published and analysed, the original archive is also still being interrogated and new themes explored in relation to it. One recent example is Dr Mark Fox's *The Fifth Love*, which adds to a burgeoning of interdisciplinary research on the nature of love involving biologists, sociologists, neurologists and philosophers and others. Fox chooses his focus by extending C.S. Lewis's famous *The Four Loves* into a Fifth, Divine Love, but most importantly by asking the question 'how might the experiences of ordinary people show us something of what supernatural, transcendent - perhaps, in some case Divine - love feels like?'. Fox explores the answer by using one hundred and fifty accounts from the archives of The Religious Experience Research Centre and the emphasis on 'ordinary people' demonstrates the extension made to the work of James and so-called religious virtuosi.

Conclusion

This article has sought to map something of past connections but also to indicate the continuing vitality of the field of research captured under the heading 'religious experience'. There is now much written both critically and positively about the bias and meaning of the terms religion and religious and their academic usefulness. The same is the case in relationship to other terms such as spiritual, spirituality and worldviews. Likewise the category experience opens up a huge interdisciplinary field of debate and so the forward momentum, as this new journal will illustrate, is in that phrase 'More To Do'.

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