

### Varieties of Religious Experience

We are now turning to a more philosophical approach to this subject matter. In the Stewart text, notice that much of the same ground is covered in the initial few pages of the text as in the Kessler, but without as much explanation. One new item is introduced. The term religion is derived from the Latin *religio* that refers to the bond between man and the gods. If you recall our previous discussion about the term theology, you might see why that discussion is relevant in light of the historical meaning of this term.

The philosophical study of religion, by virtue of the critical task of philosophy, demands detachment from personal beliefs in order to examine critically the fundamental questions raised by religion. This detachment is a necessary first step if an individual is to conduct a truly philosophical study of religion. This does not mean that an individual committed to a particular religion cannot philosophize about that tradition; that would imply that a person could not believe religiously what had been discovered philosophically, a strange state of affairs indeed! The point is that the philosophical study of religion demands a degree of detachment from personal religious beliefs. In turn, a philosophical approach to religion may well produce fresh understanding and increased clarity, upon which an even deeper commitment can be based. In a philosophical analysis of religion, the student will be enriched by contrast with the work of historians, sociologists, psychologists, and scholars of comparative religion. But encounters with these disciplines merely prepare the student for the philosophical task, which is to analyze critically the fundamental issues raised by religion and to subject these issues to rigorous scrutiny.

This passage from Stewart, I think, exemplifies what the philosophical approach should be and what aims it may accomplish. One thing is clear. The study of philosophy of religion is very much different from the practice of being religious. What philosophers need to be clear about is the subject matter of religion. But, this subject matter appears to be vast. Where should we begin? One approach is to examine some of the key terms that are clearly religious. For example, notions of the sacred, the holy, the profane, the difference between notions of good and evil and merit and sin, all illustrate notions that are clearly religious. One might even quibble about the notion of evil. Evil appears to be an ethical as well as a religious notion. The notion of the mystical is the point of departure for Stewart. As a stipulative definition, Stewart defines the mystical as any experience that results from an encounter resulting in the unification with the divine to any experience slightly out of the ordinary. There are various types of mystical experiences. The most general types are the introvertive and the extrovertive mystical experience. By introvertive mystical experience, I mean an inner withdrawal from the ordinary world and a union with the transcendent characterized by the One or divinity. An example of this is the type of union reported by Hindus as the result of meditative practices where the atman merges with Brahman. Extrovertive mystical experiences, by contrast, produce a sense of unity with nature in which all distinctions between self and nature disappear, and an experience of overwhelming totality and oneness occur. An example of this is the mystical experience the Buddha is reported to have experienced. A variation of this type of mystical experience is the communion experience. Here the experience is not that of a union with the divine, but the sense of the presence of the divine within one's life, communion with the divine, or the sense that in prayer someone is

listening. Many examples of this are found in Jewish and Christian literature.

One example of this type of mystical experience is found in St. Augustine's *Confessions*.  
(Read passage from Book 9).

Stewart, then, selects a passage from William James on mysticism.