

**The Varieties of Religious Experience: Centenary Essays** edited by Michel Ferrari. Academic, 2002. 160 pp. \$29.90 (paper). ISBN 0-907845-266. (This series of essays was also printed as a special double issue in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 9(9-10), September-October 2002.)

This anthology was published both as a book and as a special double issue of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. As implied in the title, the book is a tribute to William James' classic exploration of the psychology of religious experience. The book contains six essays, plus the editor's introduction and a critical summary response. For readers of *JSE*, this book will be of interest because it treats one of the foundational works in the scientific exploration of transcendental experiences. William James was a seminal figure in multiple regards—America's first psychologist, first transpersonal psychologist, foremost philosopher and a seminal figure in the founding of the field of psychical research. As an undergraduate studying the history of psychology in the 1960s, I was taught that William James was both America's first psychologist and its greatest psychologist. The great irony, however, that is highlighted in this centenary celebration of William James' best-known book is that despite his towering reputation and the endurance of his creative scholarship, it seems clear that, for the past century, mainstream scholarship has accomplished little of the agenda set out by James.

U.C. Berkeley psychologist Eleanor Rosch makes this point very plain and poignant in her essay titled, "How to Catch James' Mystic Germ: Religious Experience, Buddhist Meditation and Psychology." She states:

Within *The Varieties of Religious Experience* lies the germ of a truly radical idea. It is that religious experience has something important and basic to contribute to the science of psychology. Yet now, a hundred years after the publication of James' monumental work, the *mainstream* academic fields of psychology are no closer to considering, let alone implementing, this idea than they were in James' day.

I have taken the liberty of italicizing the word *mainstream* in the quote above, because the truth is that James has influenced a multiplicity of psychologists operating on the margins of the mainstream—the most notable being the thousands of psychologists who identify with the transpersonal psychology movement and its many offshoots and networks. Although transpersonal psychology has failed to gain recognition as a division of the American Psychological Association, it remains a very vibrant force in American culture. Transpersonal psychologists clearly function in a manner that honors the pioneering spirit of William James.

I regard *JSE* readers to be engaged in scientific inquiry in the spirit of William James, and the selection of this book for review by the editors indicative of that. But, let us not forget the important work being done in the areas of near-death studies, altered states of consciousness, psychosynthesis, Jungian psychology, humanistic psychology, studies of meditation and yoga, parapsychology, psychedelic drugs, holotropic therapy, noetic science, out of body experience, shamanism, alternative medicine, subtle energies and reincarnation. No matter how much mainstream psychology ignores the legacy of William James, while

paying superficial tribute to his memory, the researchers in these disciplines are carrying on very solid work in the directions that he laid down more than a century ago.

As for the lack of progress among mainstream psychologists in integrating the realms of consciousness considered important by James, it is important to note that James, himself, regarded these issues so deep and fundamental that he urged patience. With regard to psychical research, for example, he stated that "we must expect to mark progress not by quarter-centuries but by half centuries or whole centuries . . ." It is fitting then that this collection of essays honoring James appears in only the ninth volume of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. For almost a century, the very idea that consciousness, per se, was a fit subject for psychological investigation was such an anathema that scholars saw no need even for a journal. The word "psychology," whose very etymological meaning is the study of the soul, was, in effect, hijacked by behavioral scientists who wished for nothing more than to purge the soul from psychology. And, ironically, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, the most popular book written by America's greatest psychologist, was generally ignored by psychologists and, instead, taken up by scholars of religion.

My own view is that this volume signifies something of a resurrection of William James' legacy. The decades that passed between the death of William James and the birth of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* included the darkest and most violent years in all of human history: two world wars, a holocaust of genocide, vast famines, plus revolutions in China and Russia. It is not surprising to me that the study of psychology would also enter into a dark period simultaneously. Today, the global problems we are facing suggest that, possibly, we have passed through the worst period. As such, the time has come to reexamine very promising lines of thought associated with James. Eugene Taylor, in his article titled "William James and Depth Psychology," argues that much can be learned from James' exposition of pre-Freudian depth psychology, for example. Michael Ferrari, in his article titled, "William James and the Denial of Death," points out that James' own investigations in the field of psychical research, concerning the survival of human personality beyond death, went far beyond his brief treatment of the topic in *Varieties of Religious Experience*. This is probably because poor health caused James to abbreviate his original plan for the project. (The book was based on his "Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion" delivered at Edinburgh in 1901 and 1902.)

The question of survival of the human personality after death is central to all world religions. It is a subject to which William James devoted years of careful thought and investigation. James was always aware of the enormous possibilities for human deception and, therefore, cautious in drawing conclusions from his inquiries. Nevertheless, he did reach some positive conclusions concerning the possibilities of an afterlife and communication via spirit mediumship. Regrettably, this important chapter in James' work is barely touched upon in this volume. I think that a true tribute to William James would have been to draw

more heavily upon the work in parapsychology, psychical research and related fields. That was his passion. Though it is, indeed, lamentable that mainstream psychology has deviated so far from the tough questions of human consciousness that intrigued William James, a true celebration of the James impulse toward inner inquiry would have been more of a celebration of the vast and exciting (and very rigorous) investigations that still reside on the margins of academic respectability.

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**The Long Summer: How Climate Changed Civilization** by Brian Fagan. Basic Books, 2004. xvi + 284 pp. \$26.00 (hardback). ISBN 0-465-02281-2.

It has been my view that until recently insufficient attention has been given to the many long-term climate variations that have occurred since the last ice age ended. These changes had profound effects on the development and decline of cultures and civilizations all over the world, in both prehistoric and historic times.

I therefore welcome the publication of *The Long Summer* by Brian Fagan. Understanding the influence of climate conditions is essential to understanding the history of the world.

Professor Fagan is a renowned anthropologist, author of numerous books, including *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History 1300-1850*, an elaborate account showing enormous archeological and historic knowledge and understanding. The same can be said for *The Long Summer*.

The author mainly covers the period from 18000 BC (late ice age) until 1200 AD. Extended periods of cooling and extended periods of drought wreaked havoc resulting in the decline and even disintegration of civilizations and states, the causes of which until recently were poorly understood or the subject of speculation.

Professor Fagan describes expansions and prosperity of the ancients as well as the hardships in great detail by referring to archaeological and climatological evidence as well as historical records.

He divides the book into three main parts. The first, "Pumps and Conveyor Belts," describes the millenia from 18000 BC until 10000 BC. During this period Asian people migrated to the Americas and Europe began to warm, with a major setback: the thousand-year Younger Dryas period.

Part two, "The Centuries of Summer," describes the development of civilizations from 10000 BC until about 3100 BC. During these years civilizations flourished but also encountered cataclysmic events, which are extensively covered.