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Radical Explorations Of Radical Empiricism: William James's Transmissive Theory Of Mind In The Context Of Visionary Experience

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RADICAL EXPLORATIONS OF RADICAL EMPIRICISM: WILLIAM JAMES'S

TRANSMISSIVE THEORY OF MIND IN THE CONTEXT OF

VISIONARY EXPERIENCE

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VISIONARY EXPERIENCE

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The dominant ontology in science is a form of materialism and it filters down into the social sciences in ways I will touch on throughout this paper. The influence of the current dominant ontology is especially apparent when it comes to experiences and phenomena that challenge its underlying assumptions which is why I will primarily focus on visionary experience and psi phenomena as studied by radical empiricists throughout the ages.

The philosophical position of William James challenges materialist assumptions by championing the idea that the only world we can speak of is the world of our experience. William James affords academics the possibility of speaking from a place of personal experience when he argues that religious belief and visionary experience is psychologically "normal" and ripe grounds for rigorous academic consideration. Although James does not offer a systematic metaphysics, I will explore a series of analogies, metaphors, suggestions, and thick descriptions that are central to James's effort to reclaim the intimacy and role of embodied experience in philosophy and James's attempts to push empirical science into new territory that is currently assumed to be nonexistent in the dominant metaphysical episteme ruled by reductionary materialism.

I will also visit radical empiricism within the broader context of his engagement with psychical research and various modalities of religious

experience. I also draw on Edith Turner to show how James's theory of mind can be productively extended to the methods of anthropology. Edith Turner's anthropological method and interest in psychical research highlights intriguing parallels with James's philosophy. Common to these approaches is the aim to reconcile religion and science; the adoption of a radical empiricist stance; acknowledgment of the inherent fallibility of hypotheses; a heavy reliance on personal and subjective epistemology; and a challenge to the traditional Cartesian mind-body dichotomy.

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This paper is dedicated to the I in *you.*

CHAPTER 1

1.1   Introduction

The founder of American psychology and the philosophical tradition of radical empiricism, William James, affords academics the possibility of speaking from a place of experience when he argues that religious belief and visionary experience is psychologically "normal" and ripe grounds for rigorous academic consideration. Although James does not offer a systematic metaphysics, he does provide a series of analogies, metaphors, suggestions, and thick descriptions that are central to his effort to reclaim the intimacy and role of embodied experience in philosophy and to push the empirical science into new territory that is currently assumed to be nonexistent in the dominant metaphysical episteme ruled by reductionary materialism. Along the way, I seek to illumine Edith Turner's fascination with William James. To do so, I visit James's unique conception of the relation between "the world-in-itself" and individuals' conceptions of it. I also explore radical empiricism within the broader context of James's engagement with psychical research and various modalities of religious experience. I intend to draw on Edith Turner to show how James's theory of mind can be productively extended to the methods of anthropology.

I begin by providing a brief background on William James and an overview of his career. I focus on how he challenged the dominant paradigm of physicalist metaphysics with his radical empiricism. In order to accomplish this, I examine a few of the interweaving strands in philosophy of science that inform the materialist episteme James fought against to then highlight his alternative theories. After focusing on James's critiques and

alternatives, I will move to chapter two in which I will offer a cursory account of the career and contributions of anthropologist Edith Turner. I use Edith Turner, who explicitly refers to herself as a radical empiricist, as a model for how James's metaphysical theories look when applied as an anthropological method for fieldwork. I argue that anthropology reveals that there are many ways of being in the world and looking at it. In this way, metaphysics, even if it is tacit and not explicitly formulated, is relevant in that when we talk about the metaphysical, we are discussing conceptions of reality and what individuals perceive as truth. Some contemporary intellectuals may dismiss the importance of metaphysics, believing they have moved beyond it. However, it is important to be wary of such dismissals. Unconscious or unacknowledged metaphysical beliefs can be incredibly powerful and even dangerous if left unexamined.[1]

The dominant metaphysics in academia is a form of physical materialism and it filters down into the social sciences in ways I will touch on throughout this paper. The influence of the current dominant ontology is especially apparent when it comes to experiences and phenomena that challenge its underlying assumptions which is why I will focus on visionary experience and psi phenomena. Jeffrey Kripal explains that materialism "renders the human literally nonexistent and certainly irrelevant in a technological world of objects and things. The human and, certainly, human consciousness simply do not exist in this conception of reality after all. Indeed, they cannot exist in principle" (Kripal 2021, p. 374). This conflation of science with materialism and philosophical truth has been said to be "cannibalizing" the humanities.[2]

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[1] Kripal, Jeffrey. "The Future of the Human(ities): Mystical Literature, Paranormal Phenomena, and the Politics of Knowledge." *In Consciousness Unbound: Liberating Mind from the Tyranny of Materialism,* edited by Edward F. Kelly and Paul Marshall, 2021. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield. 2021, chapter 10.
[2] See The Sacred Speaks YouTube interview with Bill Barnard, found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJXt9eDG2t0

1.2 State of the Sciences

Turner and James both noted the omnipresence of a stultifying secular materialism in both the sciences and the humanities. This is not a problem of the distant past, but rather a palpable issue still facing academia today. As Jeffrey Kripal noted in 2017, even the modern study of religion has generally adopted the ontology of "secular materialism" (p. 377).[3] Scientific materialism reduces religious beliefs to empty words and reduces all decisions to biological processes that can be explained by causes and known through their consequences. In the study of religion, this is no small matter. The decision to ignore or explain away consciousness and the religious or mystical experience writ large severely limits the possibility of adequate comprehension of what it means to be human. This is what led authors of cognitive psychology textbooks to report that "cognitive psychology is not getting anywhere; in spite of our sophisticated methodology, we have not succeeded in making a substantial contribution to the understanding of the human mind" (Duncan, Glass, Holyoak, Santa 1980, p. 183).[4] Today we are still seeing, even in psychology and religious studies, a strong movement towards "materialism," i.e., toward the idea that "mind is brain." From this perspective, the mind is understood to be illusory, and so all beliefs are equally suspect in that they are "located" in the mind. When religion is defined as a set of "beliefs", these beliefs are, at least implicitly, cast as illusory byproducts of mind that can be ultimately reduced to physical matter.

However, true to James's expectations, there have been fundamental conceptual changes in physics wherein decades of empirical research have shown the materialistic model of mind to be inadequate. It is not easy to

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[3] Kripal, Jeffrey. 2017. "The Future of the Human(ities): Mystical Literature, Paranormal Phenomena, and the Politics of Knowledge." *In Consciousness Unbound: Liberating Mind from the Tyranny of Materialism,* 2021.
[4] Duncan, C. et al. "Cognition." *The American Journal of Psychology* 93, no. 1, 1980, p. 183.

change a paradigm. But we must recall David Hume's famous caution that while a mere familiarity with things is able to create a feeling of their rationality, the feeling of familiarity ought not to be equated with rationality.[5] That being said, our current psychological paradigm was more than 200 years in the making, thus it has not been easily displaced even with the advancement of physics.

The materialist theory began to take hold in the social sciences around 1747 when Julien Offray de La Mettrie extended Descartes' 1641 argument by explaining mechanical laws of human behavior based on Newtonian physics. In his book *L 'Homme Machine*, La Mettrie confidently wrote: "We therefore conclude courageously that man is a machine, and only one substance [matter] which is modified in different fashions" (1747, p. 149). From this perspective, everything, even the human spirit can be explained if you understand enough about matter, its interactions, and its emergent properties. However, it was the theory of evolution that decisively integrated biological science into modern social thought, offering materialistic explanations not only for what humanity is, but also for its origins and development.

Charles Darwin, in Samuel Butler's famous accusation, banished Mind from the universe and replaced it with natural selection, thereby raising ethical and existential questions that I will explore in coming pages.[6] Over time, the exploration of consciousness gained legitimacy as a valid area of study within neuroscience. This recognition was partly influenced by the involvement of Francis Crick (1916-2004), a distinguished physicist-turned-biologist known for his co-discovery of the double-helical structure of DNA and the genetic code. Crick came to regard consciousness as the foremost

[5] Hume, David. Treatise of Human Nature, 1978.
[6] Butler, Samuel. "Darwin Among the Machines." In *ZMK Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung*, Mediocene, Jg. 9, no. 1, 2018, p. 61-64.

enigma of biological science. In a paper co-authored with his colleague
Christof Koch in 1990, they outlined a program aimed at investigating
consciousness by delving into its presumed neural foundations. They
confidently proclaimed that "the problem of consciousness can, in the long
run, be solved only by explanations at the neural level" (Crick & Koch 1990,
p. 263).[7]

In the modern age, conception of mind as reducible to computational
algorithms and processes that are ultimately emergent, in some still
completely unknown manner, from the biological structures of the brain and
body (biological naturalism) has developed. In this view, consciousness "is
caused by brain processes and is itself a higher level feature of the brain"
(Searle 2002, p. 566).[8] Whether based in atoms, neurons, or an emergent
phenomena between the two, what these theories have in common is the
underlying assumption that material objects are comprised of Newtonian,
mechanical interactions of billiard-ball-like, insentient atoms bouncing
around in mathematically calculable patterns of cause and effect. Today, as
in James's day, "the production of consciousness in the brain is the absolute
world-enigma ... it's as great a miracle as if we said, Thought is
'spontaneously generated,' or 'created out of nothing'"(James 1897, p. 21).[9]
As an alternative to this "productive" theory of consciousness which assumes
that consciousness is "produced" by complex neurochemical activities of the
brain, James offers his "transmissive" theory, in which consciousness "does
not have to be generated de novo in a vast number of places. It exists

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[7] Crick, F., & Koch, C. "Towards a Neurobiological Theory of Consciousness." *Seminars in Neuroscience* 2, 1990, p. 263-275.
[8] Searle, John R. *Consciousness and Language*. Cambridge, U.K.; Cambridge University Press, 2002. For more, see "Problems with Biological Naturalism" in Kelly et al., *Irreducible Mind,* 2007, chapter 2.
[9] James, William. "The Will to Believe." *In The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. New York: Dover, 1956, p. 1-31. Drawing heavily on this text, it is here on cited as WTB. See abbreviations listed in appendix.

already, behind the scenes, coeval with the world" (WTB, p. 22).[10] From the perspective of the "transmissive theory" of consciousness, the brain works to receive and filter limited forms of consciousness and to receive and shape "transmissions" from a cosmic consciousness into forms of consciousness that are appropriate to daily life here on earth, in much the same way that a television receives and shapes pre-existing electromagnetic transmissions into shows that can be watched on the screen.[11]

James was not alone in suggesting that we spend extra care evaluating the assumptions that often operate beneath the surface of our consciousness and which exert significant influence on our perceptions and interpretations of who we are and the nature of the world in which we live. This notion resonates with Kant's exploration of epistemes, wherein he emphasizes the importance of unearthing the underlying frameworks that shape our understanding of reality. Foucault, building upon Kant's insights, contends that traditional histories of science tend to focus narrowly on conscious individual perspectives, thereby overlooking the more profound influence of unconscious rules governing thought, speech, and action. For instance, when examining figures like Darwin, scholars typically dissect their explicit beliefs and arguments, while neglecting the unconscious forces that dictate what is deemed worthy of consideration within scientific discourse. To understand human behavior more fully, Foucault therefore suggests delving into the unconscious regulations that guide our actions and decisions. These regulations dictate which ideas are deemed worthy of consideration, form the contours of acceptable discourse within a particular historical epoch, and determine which ideas are relegated to the fringes of obscurity.[12] Foucault's

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[10] Originally coined the "transmission" theory by James but referenced frequently as the "transmissive" theory.
[11] James, William. *Human Immortality: Two Supposed Objections to the Doctrine*. New York: Dover. 1898, p. 86-89. Here on cited as HI. See appendix.
[12] Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. 2nd ed. Routledge Classics. London, England: Routledge, 2002.

term "episteme" is more appropriate to the subject matter than Kuhn's terminology of paradigms because paradigms are often conscious rules operating at the level of individual disciplines. Epistemes have a connotation of vastness, a stretching, an unconscious extension of influence across the entire intellectual landscape. They refer to the rules that determine which thoughts you take seriously enough to really consider and which ones you do not. For example, I made a conscious decision which shirt to wear today. Short sleeve, long sleeve, blue, black—I decided what shirt to wear. However, I never made a conscious decision to wear a shirt. It is a preset starting assumption; it would not cross my mind to not wear a shirt to work. Even if that question ended up crossing the threshold of my conscious awareness, it would be easy to dismiss and even chuckle at. While unconscious, this preset assumption is pragmatic. Similarly, James challenges us to look at some of the rules at work in our episteme in that he challenges the taken-for-granted materialism in which mind is equated with the brain and its structures and matter is assumed to be devoid of experience. James's radical empiricism challenges these assumptions by championing the idea that the only world we can speak of is the world of our experience.

In 1974 the philosopher Thomas Nagel wrote 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?' and challenged the materialists by framing consciousness not as a function of the brain but as subjective *experience.*[13] Nagel urges us to consider 'what it is like' to be a bat, or any other conscious creature. Although we can ascertain general assumptions about their subjective situation in an environment (umwelt), we cannot know phenomenologically what it is like to experience echolocation or what it is like for another person to experience the taste of chocolate. We cannot know how the tick experiences

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[13] Nagel, Thomas. "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83, no 4. 1974, p. 435–50.

a butyric acid colored world.[14] Just as James suggested 100 years prior, Nagel returns to the idea that there is something distinct about subjective experience or phenomenal consciousness that cannot be reduced to a mere physical function. To show this, my next task will be to explain some of James's life, interests, ideas, and classic metaphors of mind that enable us to untangle the materialistic paradigm that chokes the humanities.

1.3   Life and Thought of William James

William James, born in 1842, taught the first psychology course in America and has come to be celebrated as the founder of American psychology and the philosophical tradition of pragmatism. James is considered by many scholars to be one of the most influential thinkers of the 19th century.[15] He used arguments from psychology to uphold the thesis that religious belief was psychologically normal. He was outspoken against an atomistic view of consciousness and challenged the Cartesian assumption of the division of the world of mind and external reality and suggested that the only world we can speak of with confidence is the world of our experience.

Though not immediately obvious when glancing through James's publication record, psychical research deeply preoccupied the attention of William James for over twenty-five years. He was a founding member of the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR), which was a branch of the London Society for Psychical Research. This group was comprised of respected members of the scientific community. Membership included Oxford and Cambridge faculty and even Arthur Balfour, who later became prime minister of England. James also actively participated in various committees within the organization including the Committee on Work, the Committee on Mediumistic

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[14] This is Jacob Von Uexkülls concept of die Umwelt found in *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere,* 1909. He theorized that different organisms have different Umwelts even when they share the same environment.
[15] Kuklick, B. *The Rise of American Philosophy*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860-1930. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977, p. 334.

Phenomena, the Committee on Experimental Psychology, and the Committee on Hypnotism. James only published two public articles on psychical research, titled "What Psychical Research Has Accomplished" (1892) and "The Confidences of a 'Psychical Researcher'"(1909). The majority of his psychical research is in the form of summaries, notes, and interpretations printed exclusively in the journals and proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) and subsequently, the ASPR. Throughout James's work, the reader will find cautions against what James terms "vicious intellectualism" in which we reduce our being-in-the-world to excessively limiting concepts. This process is vicious in that by focusing on the conceptual overlay, we often fail to meaningfully engage with the very things we are attempting to understand. These concerns regarding intellectualism are why James advocates for an appreciation of the "vague" that we will come back to in chapter two, and why James often speaks in a series of metaphors.

Next, I will show how James's pragmatism and psychical research were not unrelated occupations of his mind but were intertwined and coemergent. James's motivation to engage in psychical research was rooted in his moral and intellectual concerns regarding the increasingly materialistic inclinations that foreclose potential lines of inquiry. In his lifetime, many of his mainstream contemporaries, like Julian Huxley, Herbert Spencer, and W. K. Clifford were arguing for the reducibility of mind to matter—a claim we still contend with today.

1.4   Radical Empiricism and Psychical Research

By the end of James's lifelong fascination with facts that do not fit into the materialist's framework and his extensive examination of the mind-body problem, he provided many theories and methods to push empirical science into new territory, territory that is often assumed to be nonexistent from within the dominant metaphysical episteme. Defending the scientific study of

"wild facts", he consistently insisted that "anyone will renovate his science who will steadily look after the irregular phenomena" (James E.inP., p. 249; WTB, p. 223).[16] This is exactly what James went on to do, building a philosophy he called "radical empiricism" around the odd and novel data he was continually discovering in his research.

Though there is much to say about radical empiricism, in a nutshell: James's radical empiricism invites a pragmatic methodology in which all claims concerning beliefs, faith, and facts ought to be treated as "tenable hypotheses", that are "liable to modification in the course of future experience" (PRAG, p. 39). James's depiction of religious beliefs as "hypotheses" is important to note. His decision to use the word "hypotheses" is indicative of James's insistence that, once adopted on practical grounds, religious beliefs ought to be susceptible to revision in light of subsequent experience. In fact, James goes on to define "faith" in these seemingly scientific terms:

> Faith is synonymous with working hypothesis. The only difference is that while some hypotheses can be refuted in five minutes, others may defy ages. [… These theories] may exhaust the labors of generations in their corroboration, each tester of their truth proceeding in this simple way – that he acts as if it were true, and expects the result to disappoint him if his assumption is false. The longer disappointment is delayed, the stronger grows his faith in his theory (WTB 1882, p.79)

James goes on throughout the *Will to Believe (WTB)* and other texts to use the words "belief" and "hypothesis" interchangeably.[17] However, while James was at times criticized from this interchangeability, it is critical to remember that, for James, a hypothesis is something that we adopt, that guides our actions in the world, and that we can revise in the light of contrary

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[16] See also Charles Fort's "damned facts" and Kripal's exposition on Fort in Kripal, Jeffrey J, Andrea Jain, Erin Prophet, and Ata Anzali. *Comparing Religions*. 1st ed. Chichester: Wiley, 2014, p. 259.
[17] See Aikin, Scott F. *Evidentialism and the Will to Believe*. 1st ed. Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

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experience. For the pragmatist, this is true even for religious beliefs.

Unlike Kant who insulates religious belief from the world of experience, for

James religious beliefs are guides for action, which remain forever revisable

in the light of subsequent experience.[18] No beliefs are too sacred to be

tested. Additionally, James's *Will to Believe* thesis was intended to combat

the influence of materialistic thought popular at the time, such as the

evidentialism of W.K. Clifford that still lurks in academic circles today.

    Clifford's evidentialism can be summed up in his famous quote that "it

is wrong, always and for everyone, to believe anything on insufficient

evidence", no matter the case or how seemingly petty it may be (Clifford,

1877). The obligation Clifford sets here is as constricting as Kant's

categorical imperative- for Clifford there is no one at any time who is

exempt from these commands. He argues that it is wrong to believe anything

without appropriate evidence and to do so is to foster ignorance,

superstition, malice, and untruth.[19] Clifford is basically telling us: don't

get it wrong. It's more damaging to wrongfully believe than it is to be

ignorant of truth because your recognition of truth has nothing to do with

its own execution. For example, your understanding of gravity is independent

of gravity itself. Whether you rightly understand that there are 9.8 newtons

of force pushing you into Earth's core or not, the force of gravity is acting

on you all the same.[20] On the other hand, a wrong belief will spread

systemically, likened to dropping toxic waste in a public river.[21]

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[18] Kant, Immanuel. Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason in Commemoration of the Centenary of Its First Publication. London: Macmillan, 1881, section VI titled, "Of the Postulates of Pure Practical Reason Generally."
[19] Clifford, William Kingdon. The Scientific Basis of Morals, and Other Essays Viz.: Right and Wrong, The Ethics of Belief, The Ethics of Religion. Project Gutenberg. Chapter III, p. 169-175.
[20] Ibid, p. 172.
[21] Clifford says, "No real belief, however trifling and fragmentary it may seem, is ever truly insignificant; it prepares us to receive more of its like, confirms those which resembled it before, and weakens others; and so gradually it lays a stealthy train in our inmost thoughts, which may someday explode into overt action, and leave its stamp upon our character forever" (Ibid, p. 17).

James presents a pragmatic counter to evidentialism. He generally

agrees with Clifford that we should be willing to put our beliefs up for

scrutiny and seek evidence. James asserts that even our religious beliefs

should be subject to the same epistemic norms and scrutiny as our other

beliefs.[22] Nevertheless, James also holds that certain practical beliefs can

be validly adopted without adequate evidence as in the case of "genuine

options" (WTB, p. 29). Genuine options are options that are live, forced, and

momentous. The adoption of the belief in question is what allows evidence of

its truth or invalidity to become accessible.[23] Some matters cannot be

suspended to wait for intellectual proof. James asks readers to consider

situations that don't have enough evidence to make a logical conclusion. For

example, you cannot afford to align yourself with Clifford's conservative

stance if you are choosing between two doctors' new surgical methods. You

can't suspend the "living options" presented in your daily life. Instead,

sometimes you have to choose without sufficient evidence. Furthermore, James

critiques Clifford's evidentialism by arguing that if we only decide beliefs

based on a surplus of evidence, we would we not be able to prosper in our

personal trust-based relationships, in our daily ethical dilemmas, nor in our

spiritual endeavors. James notes that if evidentialism were to be widely

accepted, everyone would come to hold the same beliefs and the plurality of

faiths and individual uniqueness would diminish. It is for these reasons that

James accuses Cliffordian evidentialism of demonstrating an "insane logic,"

which would both prevent us from believing on faith things which are

practically vital to our lives (such as autonomy, free will) while also

preventing us from accessing the evidence required to assess these beliefs.[24]

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[22] WTB, p. 29.
[23] For a condensed version, see Pals, Daniel L. *Nine Theories of Religion.* Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 196.
[24] WTB, p. 29.

There is much more that could be said about this, but we will leave this issue here until we circle around to examine the standards of evidence and belief for psi phenomena that are presented in chapter two. (James was fascinated by verifiable forms of mediumistic and visionary knowledge that many would still dismiss, but which nevertheless have borne evidential fruit).

James himself describes his radical empiricism as "a deep psychological and philosophical commitment to two claims: (1) one must not deny anything that is experienced; and (2) one must not deny the potency of human action" (WTB, p. 25). For pragmatists like James, the truth of a belief is a function of the way the belief is taken up into our general experience. As he points out, not its origin, but the way it works within the whole, is the final test of a belief.[25] He continually reiterates this point throughout his scholarship. He later says, "Truth, for pragmatists… refers to a communal inquiry that creates working hypotheses" (PRAG p. 37). It is not, as James says in *Pragmatism*, a "static relation of 'correspondence . . . between our minds and reality'" but rather a "rich and active commerce . . . between particular thoughts of ours, and the great universe of other experiences" into which they fit (39). Truth is not a fixed end point, but rather always revisable in face of contradictory evidence.[26] This method of "radical empiricism" thus allowed him to encompass phenomena often marginalized by his disciplinary matrix within the scope of his inquiry, recognizing them as potentially natural occurrences. In this way, William James set up future scholarship on the study of alterations of consciousness and advocated for their potential usefulness. Based on his own mystical experiences using nitrous oxide, James wrote:

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[25] VRE, p. 24-25.
[26] PRAG, p. 35-38.

> Our normal waking consciousness is but one special type of
> consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of
> screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different…
> No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves
> these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard
> them is the question…They open regions though they fail to give a
> map…at any rate they forbid a premature closing of our accounts of
> reality (VRE, p. 298)

Even earlier, in *Principles of Psychology*, James (1890) sought to integrate
the more ordinary states of awareness with altered states of consciousness
(ASCs), for instance in his chapter on the self in which he covered both the
ordinary sense of the self as well as less common experiences of self as seen
in moments of dissociation and possession. Similarly, *In Human Immortality:
Two Supposed Objections to the Doctrine*, he agrees that there is evidence for
the functional dependence of the mind and brain and that there is an obvious
relationship between the physical structure of the brain and consciousness.[27]
However, James urges us to question the assumptions about what that
relationship is. James distills two primary ways people try to understand the
mind-brain relationship: productive theories and transmissive theories.[28] The
productive theory postulates that the neurochemical activity of the brain
"produces" consciousness, similar to the way steam is produced from the
kettle.[29] James notes that it is just as logical to postulate that the brain
receives, funnels, and directs preexisting awareness. He uses the analogy of
the colored stained-glass dome to exemplify his transmissive theory of mind.[30]

In the case of colored stained-glass dome, the energy of light is sifted
by the glass and limited in color. The color of the world does not change
when you put on yellow tinted glasses, but the yellow lens determines a
certain pattern, that of yellowness. The dome transmits light into the room

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[27] HI, p. 84.
[28] WTB, p. 15. *P*roductive theories can also be found in the literature as "generative" theories,
see also *emergence* theories.
[29] *HI*, p. 84-86.
[30] *WTB*, p.16.

but light is not produced by the dome. One can set out on a quest to learn everything there is to know about the physical composition of glass, but it would be deluded to believe that by studying the physical properties of dome's glass that you are learning about the nature of light. Light is refracted into colors by the prism, as James suggests that mind is "bent," "stained", or "distorted" into its various incarnations by the brain.[31] The white light of larger preexisting consciousness, regardless of its ontologic status, is filtered by the glass and limited by the prism to a certain shape.[32]

James offers another way we can understand the transmissive function through an analogy of organ keys. Pressing an organ key allows wind to create various tones as the wind escapes in various ways. The air is not engendered in the organ, but the organ is an apparatus for filtering portions of the air into the world in peculiarly limited shapes.[33] The *transmissive* theory therefore is an intentional move away from *productive theories* of consciousness, in which the physical (neurochemical) underwiring somehow *produces* our conscious experience. In transmissive theories, the brain's task is to receive and transmit limited forms of consciousness.[34]

According to James, our typical state of consciousness is "finely attuned to our terrestrial world, but there are vulnerabilities in this enclosure, allowing intermittent influences to seep through, unveiling an otherwise unverifiable shared connection" (James, *Confidences Of A Psychical Researcher*, p. 374). Together, these analogies also express a critical idea of James's thought, that of the "filter" function. In the analogy of the

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[31] James, William. *Essays in Religion and Morality*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press. 1898, p. 85-87.
[32] WTB, p. 14. See also Barnard, Bill. Entheogens In A Religious Context: The Case Of The Santo Daime Religious Tradition." *Zygon* 49 (3). 2014, p. 666-84.
[33] HI, p. 14-15; Gardner, Murphy. *William James On Psychical Research*. The Viking Press, New York. 1960, p. 291.
[34] See also Barnard, William. *Liquid Light: Ayahuasca Spirituality and the Santo Daime Tradition.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2022, p. 50-65.

stained-glass window, the filter is the window.[35] You do not get unfiltered

light; rather it is passing through a colored lens. The coloring of the glass

is significant. The productive theories of mind assume that "yellow" is a

property of the light, rather than understanding that yellow is a filter

overlaid on top. Perception has a filter mechanism; the yellow patterns are

in the glass.

From a Jamesian point of view, experiences of altered states of

consciousness should not be dismissed as mere hallucinations. Instead,

drawing from the "filter" theory, James would rather portray them as

"universal keys" capable of unlocking undiscovered dimensions within our

minds and disclosing previously unrecognized dimensions of reality. Through

these experiences, individuals have the opportunity to have real, meaningful

experiences through the exploration of previously unknown territories,

including non-mystical subconscious layers of the mind. (Years later, Aldous

Huxley suggested that psychedelics may override the "*reducing valve* of the

brain" that allows for, what he called, the "mind at large" to break through

in altered states of consciousness).[36] James also uses his metaphor of the

stained-glass dome as a way to understand alternate states of

consciousnesses, when he discusses how the sun's rays might be expressed

differently, depending on the opacity of the dome:

> The dome, opaque enough at all times to the full solar-blaze, could at
> certain times and places grow less so, and let certain beams pierce
> through into this sublunary world. These beams would be so many finite
> rays, so to speak, of consciousness, and they would vary in quantity as
> the opacity varied in degree (WTB, 16)

In the *Principles,* James further developed an important distinction that

appears across many languages, knowledge by acquaintance (connaître, kennen,

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[35] James borrowed this analogy; it was originally presented by Percy Shelley in his poem
"Adonais."
[36] Huxley, Aldous. 2004 [1954]. *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*. New York: Harper-
Perennial, 1954, p. 11-12, 23.

noscere) and knowledge about (savoir, Wissen, scire).[37] This distinction stuck

with James and became crucial to the development of radical empiricism.

Knowledge about is knowledge based on concepts, their relations, and

"categories of understanding". It is the intellectual overlay of finding

likeness and difference, explaining, and describing the qualities of an

object. By contrast, knowledge by acquaintance is the unmediated knowledge of

direct knowledge, the ineffable knowledge that can never be fully captured by

words-- the "thatness" of experiencing phenomena, whether what it's like to

be a bat or the subjective sensation of the color blue.[38] Here is an example

of knowledge by acquaintance:

> I know the color blue when I see it, and the flavor of a pear when I
> taste it; I know an inch when I move my finger through it; a second of
> time, when I feel it pass; an effort of attention when I make it; a
> difference between two things when I notice it; but about the inner
> nature of these facts or what makes them what they are, I can say
> nothing at all. I cannot impart acquaintance with them to any one who
> has not already made it himself I cannot describe them, make a blind
> man guess what blue is like (PP. 221)

While these conceptual categories around two kinds of knowing are helpful,

James continually reminds us that the distinction between these two kinds of

knowledge is ultimately relative, not absolute.[39] Each moment of knowing is a

fusion of both kinds of knowledge. Even in states of heightened perception,

such as visionary experiences, sensory input is still filtered through our

embodied histories, memories, and conceptual frameworks. Despite variations

in the intensity of illumination we receive in different states, this light

is always filtered through the prism of the dome. All instances of knowing

are fusions of both types of knowledge. For example, as in the case of Mrs.

Piper, a medium who was extensively studied by James and other members of the

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[37] Originally noted by Grote in 1865.
[38] See also Nagel, 1974, p. 435-50.
[39] James makes this point in PP 1.221. Unlike Bertrand Russell for whom the distinction between Kennen and Wissen play a foundational epistemic role, see Russell, Bertrand. "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 11, 1910, p. 108-28.

Society for Psychical Research, it is said that "out of her trances came extraordinary personal insight" but they were "muddled, tangled with vaguely Christian notions of life after death, ambiguous messages of cheery goodwill, and rather pointless conversation" (Blum, p. 182).[40] That is, her knowledge-by-acquaintance produced verifiable insights that were filtered through her knowledge-about ways of understanding herself and her world. Even when the threshold is lowered in a trance state, allowing Mrs. Piper to have striking knowledge of the lives of others, nonetheless, her language was still riddled with her cultural background knowledge. This example goes to show that even in states where perceptual capacity is heightened, you cannot rid yourself of the conceptual capacity of the "filter" of mind. This highlights how all knowledge is a combination of both kinds of knowing as well as the vastness of the "filter" property of mind. However, it is important to remember that for James, despite the psychological and cultural construction of the stained-glass window, real light is pouring through.

It is important to not misread James's position as if he claims that we focus too much on intellectual knowledge-about and that we fail to give adequate attention to feeling, action, and knowledge by acquaintance. James insists that intellect, emotion, sensations, and knowledge are not separate contending parties.[41] He also argues that it is "through feelings that we become acquainted with things, but only by our thoughts do we know about them" (PP 1. 221). (This truth unveils itself in many studies of shamanism as well: emotion and intellect do not cancel each other out but rather positively enforce each other.[42]) According to James, feelings and rational intellect should not be separated. Feelings can carry intellectual content

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[40] Blum, Deborah. Ghost Hunters: William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life After Death. New York: Penguin, 2006, p. 182.
[41] Chapter of *WTB* titled *The Sentiment of Rationality*, p. 67-72.
[42] See also Keeney, Bradford. *Bushman Shaman: Awakening the Spirit through Ecstatic Dance.* Rochester, Vt: Destiny Books, 2005. p. 159, 186 and Prechtel, M. *Secrets Of The Talking Jaguar: Memoirs From The Living Heart Of A* Mayan Village. Princeton, N.J:c2008, p. 278, 281.

and ideas are often bound up with emotion. This is key to remember as we move to James's discussion of the "noetic" component of religious experience. Religious experience can act as a "higher kind of emotion" that can convey knowledge without the overlay of concepts provided by the intellect (E.R.E, p. 46). It is only through experience (e.g., perception) that we become acquainted with objects. James claims perception and sensation are the "germ and starting point of knowledge" (PP 1. 222). Likewise, James suggests a dialectical conception of language and experience: "Perception prompts our thought and thought in turn enriches our perception. The more we see, the more we think; while the more we think, the more we see in our immediate experiences, and the greater grows the detail and the more significant the articulateness of our perception" (PP p. 108-109). As we have more experiences, more data is anticipated, classified, until the world around us becomes manageable islands of stability that allow the world to become increasingly coherent. James asserts that all knowledge is a fusion of perception and conception, because neither perception in itself nor concepts of themselves know reality.[43] In an unpublished letter to Francis Bradley, James advises him to use both perception and conception in philosophy as we use both blades of a pair of scissors.[44]

James concludes from his discussion of sensation, perception, and space that we select certain sensations to be the bearers of reality. As he notes:

> The individual self, which I believe to be the only thing properly called self, is a part of the content of the world experienced. The world experienced (otherwise called the 'field of consciousness') comes at all times with our body at its center, center of vision, center of action, center of interest. Where the body is "here;" when the body acts is "now"; what the body touches is "this"; all other things are "there" and "then" and "that." These words of emphasized position imply a systematization of things with reference to a focus of action and interest which lies in the body (ERE p. 168)

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[43] See also PU, p. 344 note 8; For elaboration within modern work, see Barnard, *Liquid Light,* 2020, p. 50-54.
[44] Kenna, J. C., and William James. "Ten Unpublished Letters from William James, 1842-1910 to Francis Herbert Bradley, 1846-1924." *Mind* 75, no. 299 (1966): 309–31, Letter Nine.

Reality is more encompassing than the knowable. While necessary and inescapable, concepts, logic, and language do not exhaust what is real. This basic claim, which we have traced throughout James's theoretical structure, is one of the unique features afforded by James's pragmatic method. We will continue this thread in the context of James's work with psychical studies before we then move to Edith Turner's fieldwork and the evidence of psi phenomena.

James's investigation of psi phenomena was guided by his frequently quoted epistemological assertion: in order to disprove the assertion that all crows are black, one white crow is sufficient. Mrs. Piper was the white crow for William James, she was the one counterexample needed to disprove the assumption that all mediums are frauds.[45] Leonora Piper never set out to be a famous medium. She was a Boston housewife who attracted James's academic attention for over two decades. According to the historian of science, Deborah Blum, Mrs. Piper "didn't want to be a medium. She was expecting a second child. She wanted to be a mother and a respectable wife. Still, she had to wonder if this was some God-given gift. Leonora Piper prayed over it. She couldn't quite bring herself to turn away all the callers" (Blum 2006, p. 98).

Mrs. Piper was a medium who would enter trance states that she likened to a feeling of numbness that felt like "descending into a dense and chilly fog" (Blum 2006, p. 100). She was by no means correct all the time, but over 25 years of frequent sessions, she had numerous dazzling moments of knowing verifiable knowledge that kept the researchers coming back for years. For example, during one trance session Mrs. Piper channeled a deceased brother

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[45] "If you wish to upset the law that all crows are black, you mustn't seek to show that no crows are it is enough if you prove one single crow to be white. My own white crow is Mrs. Piper. In the trances of this medium, I cannot resist the conviction that knowledge appears which she has never gained by the ordinary waking use of her eyes and ears and wits" (William James, *Science*, NS III, p. 884).

who said that he could currently hear his sister playing the piano. Richard

Hodgson, a key researcher with the SPR, who was alone with Mrs. Piper and

taking notes, recorded the time as 11:26 a.m. and sent a telegram to the

parents after the sitting, asking if the daughter had been playing the piano

that morning. The mother replied that normally her daughter would have been

in school at that time, but that particular day she was home due to bad

weather and that she had indeed been playing between 11:15 and 11:30 a.m.[46]

After sitting through hundreds of Mrs. Piper's sessions, the question of how

Mrs. Piper could have known so many detailed and accurate facts become

increasingly compelling. With the possibility of fraud removed (which the

researchers in the SPR worked diligently to accomplish), how could Mrs. Piper

receive such intimately detailed and largely accurate information from

deceased friends and relatives of the sitters? Even if only one of the

hundreds accounts of her mediumship was accurate, we must consider what that

would mean for our theories. Many skeptics analyzed Piper's sittings and

while they granted that she presented some remarkable insights, they still

suspected that she might be a fraud (Blum 2006, p. 305). In order to

rigorously test the authenticity of her trances—in which she appeared to be

controlled by an alien personality—she was subjected to painful and invasive

stimulations by several skeptics. The men of the Society for Psychical

Research wanted to test the limits and authenticity of her trance state: "How

deep was it? Could it be penetrated, broken by sensations? The men pricked

her with pins, burned her arm with a match, held ammonia under her nose.

Nothing seemed to disturb the sleeplike daze" (Blum 2006, p. 164).

Skeptics Like Stanley Hall and Martin Gardner would even attest to "the

simplicity and honesty of her character", yet immediately used her earnest

nature to challenge the authenticity of Piper's reports (Gardener p. 20).

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[46] Blum, Deborah. Ghost Hunters: William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life After Death, 2006, p. 113.

They would use her character against her, as, for example, when they reported that "no successful con artist acts like a con artist. No fake psychic ever gives the impression of being anything but honest" (Gardner 1960, p. 23).[47] (I would suggest that we do not want to be as *a priori* critical of Piper as her skeptical critics were and overshoot the mark, nonetheless we also do not want to be naïve and accept everything at face value.[48])

Hall called his skeptical project part of the "battle of good science against evil mysticism." Hall goes on to describe his picture of what science is and does:

> Science is indeed a solid island set in the midst of a stormy, foggy and uncharted sea, and all of these phenomena are of the sea and not the land. If there have been eras of enlightenment, it is because these cloud banks of superstition . . . have lifted for a space or season (Blum 2006, p. 305)

While Hall's scientific picture of the world is one of dry land only, James's vision is more encompassing, consisting of both land and sea. James is more sensitive to the "foggy" insights of Leonora Piper and takes a generally more charitable approach. James writes:

> I cannot resist the conviction that knowledge appears which she has never gained by the ordinary waking use of her eyes and ears and wits. What the source of this knowledge may be I know not, and have not the glimmer of an explanatory suggestion to make; but from admitting the fact of such knowledge I can see no escape…… I feel as if, though the evidence be flimsy in spots, it may nevertheless collectively carry heavy weight. The rigorously scientific mind may, in truth, easily overshoot the mark. Science means, first of all, a certain dispassionate method. To suppose that it means a certain set of results that one should pin one's faith upon and hug forever is sadly to mistake its genius, and degrades the scientific body to the status of a sect (James, WTB, p. 199)

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[47] Murphy, Gardner. *William James On Psychical Research*, 1960.
[48] For more on this, see Ruetenik, Tadd. "Last Call for William James: On Pragmatism, Piper, and the Value of Psychical Research." *The Pluralist* 7, No. 1. Spring 2012, p. 72-93.

Similarly, James confesses that the ambiguous results of his work with Mrs. Piper and others left him as baffled as when he started his psychical research. He reflects:

> At times I have been tempted to believe that the Creator has eternally intended this department of nature to remain baffling…although ghosts and clairvoyances, and messages from spirits, are **always seeming to exist and can never be fully explained away, they also can never be susceptible of full corroboration** (Essays in Psychical Research, p. 362, emphasis my own)

So how long should one live in such an unsettled state and what do we believe in the face of live options? To navigate this question, we will address the three criteria James gives to evaluate the pragmatic truth of a claim in coming sections.

James's religious pragmatism leads neither to a full condemnation nor a complete vindication of Mrs. Piper. Equipped with the radical empiricist's criterion, James argues that even if mediums are not speaking directly with the dead or distant, it is not difficult to find something of personal and philosophic value within the dynamics of mediumistic communication.[49] While remarking on his interactions with Piper, James admits:

> When you find your questions answered and your allusions understood; when allusions are made that you think you understand, and your thoughts are met by anticipation, denial, or corroboration; when you have approved, applauded, or exchanged banter, or thankfully listened to advice that you believe in; it is difficult not to take away an impression of having encountered something sincere in the way of a social phenomenon (as cited in Simon 1998, p. 288)

While this quote is reminiscent of a diary entry of a young man falling in love, James is actually falling for the phenomenon itself. Mrs. Piper, who never claimed to be savant medium, proved to be James's "white crow," and

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[49] Ruetneik, Tadd. "Last Call for William James: On Pragmatism, Piper, and the Value of Psychical Research." *The Pluralist* 7, No. 1. 2012, p. 81. See also Barnard, William. *Liquid Light: Ayahuasca Spirituality and the Santo Daime Tradition.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2022, p. 203-226.

until the end of his life he acknowledged that he could never detect fraudulent activity, nor could he reasonably explain her abilities.[50] Also apparent in his writings is a sensitivity to the ethics of relationships. In addition to his charitable and empathetic attitude to those he is studying, he also offers three criteria for evaluating the value of religious insights on their own terms. These criteria are 1) immediate luminosity, 2) philosophical reasonableness, and 3) moral helpfulness.[51] Immediate luminosity is the feeling of unmediated, self-evident reality as supplied by experience. Philosophical reasonableness is not a measure of how airtight our logical syllogisms are, but rather a criterion we can use to assess whether knowledge in nonordinary states of awareness can be shown to be reasonable and coherent within a rationally defensible belief system. And finally, "moral helpfulness" is demonstrated if the knowledge brings positive consequences for individuals and their communities.

One of the biggest hurdles for modern academics in accepting nonordinary mental phenomena and the knowledge gained from altered states of consciousness is that of philosophical reasonableness. Given our current episteme of materialism, many scholars immediately and reflexively deny the philosophical reasonableness of psi phenomena. In Edith Turner's words: "the old social scientist types reject this material as unusable— which it is, under the definitions of old social science" (2006, 44).[52] We will return to this problem and how Edith Turner responds to it shortly after attending to what these core phenomena are.

1.5   Core Experiences

David Hufford, an ethnographer and medical folklorist, has written widely on what he terms the Experiential Core Hypothesis. He, like Michael

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[50] WTB, p. 199.
[51] VRE, p. 308-338.
[52] Turner, Edith. "Advances in the Study of Spirit Experience: Drawing Together Many Threads." *Anthropology of Consciousness* 17 (2), 2006, p. 33-61. Here on cited as ASSE. See appendix.

Harner, suggests that there are a limited number of experiences that, while culturally filtered and interpreted, express remarkable similarity across time and culture. Encapsulated under what David Hufford identifies as "core experiences" are mediumship, near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences, encounters with spiritual beings, shamanistic travel, spiritual healing, and psi phenomena. By studying these phenomena, James and Hufford both believed it was possible to discern recurring elements that endure across different times and cultures.[53] While anthropologists of religion have been wary of this search for universals in the postmodern era, preferring to see each phenomenon in its particular embodied instantiation, there are elements of the perennial approach that have resurfaced in potentially fruitful ways. William James and Edith Turner both argue that we should take up a rigorous comparative study of visionary experiences for they could potentially provide us information about the nature of the reality. For example, the use of repetitive drumming to ride into trance states is so common that it is colloquially referred to around the world as the "shamans' horse" or "canoe".[54] Core experiences such as spiritual healing, shamanic trance, clairvoyance, mediumship, and lucid dreaming tend to be regarded in the modern Western perspective as "paranormal". In James words, "No part of the unclassified residuum has usually been treated with a more contemptuous scientific disregard than the mass of phenomena generally called mystical… All the while, however, the phenomena are there, lying broadcast over the surface of history" (WTB, p. 223)[55]. James would urge us to pay close

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[53] Hufford, David. "Beings Without Bodies: An Experience-Centered Theory Of The Belief In Spirits." In B. Walker (ed.), *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural.* Logan, UT: University of Utah Press. 1995, p. 11-45.

[54] Michael Harner explains that among the Soyot people in Tuva, Siberia, the drum is called the "shaman's horse" because it helps them "fly to the Upper and Lower Worlds" with its beats that resemble a horse's hooves. Harner goes on to state, "the drum not only helps one travel shamanically but stimulates visionary experiences. Thus, the Sami ("Lapp") people of northern Scandinavia call the drum literally "a thing out of which pictures come" (*gavados*)." (Harner 2013, chapter 3 n. 36-38). *Cave and Cosmos: Shamanic Encounters with Another Reality.* Atlantic Books, 2013, see section titled "Recognizing the Power of the Drum".

[55] Goulet, Jean-Guy, and David E. Young. *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience.* 1st ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019.

attention to these core experiential phenomena, particularly where they are linked to evidential data, whether from an apparent past life, non-local cognition, an out-of-body experience, or mediumistically transmitted information.[56]

These phenomena are regarded with suspicion in many academic circles, but there are modern religious studies scholars who are prepared to embrace the strangeness of the world and, in the words of Jeffrey Kripal:

> to understand, to *really* understand that we are already and always have been living in a super natural world, that we ourselves are highly evolved prisms or mediums of this super nature coming into consciousness, and that many of the things we are constantly told are impossible are in fact not only possible but also the whispered secrets of what we are, where we are, and why we are here (Strieber and Kripal 2016, p. 2)[57]

Thus, the task for anthropologists goes beyond recognizing the validity of such experiences within specific cultural contexts. It entails delving deeper to understand both the unique manifestations of possession and the genesis of the phenomenon. It is significant to note that describing certain experiences as universal or "core" should not conjure an image of uniformity. These experiences are not the same for everyone; each person is a unique blend of past experiences, inhabits a distinct biome, possesses a psycho-spiritual identity with autonomy, and belongs to particular communities with their own social and cultural dynamics. Life entails continually weaving new experiential patterns, which may demonstrate a degree of predictability while also embodying originality and creativity.[58] Various cultures may develop

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[56] This argument is also made by David E. Presti in "Expanding a Science of Consciousness," in *Consciousness Unbound: Liberating Mind from the Tyranny of Materialism*, ed. Edward F. Kelly and Paul Marshall, 2021, p. 323-325. For more on apparent past lives and non-local cognition see "Near Death Experiences and Related Phenomena" in *Irreducible Mind,* 2007, chapter 6.
Targ, Russell. "What Do We Know about Psi? The First Decade of Remote-Viewing Research and Operations at Stanford Research Institute." *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 33 (4), 2019, p. 569-92; for more on mediumistically transmitted information see Hunter, *Manifesting Spirits*, 2021.
[57] Located in Strieber, W and Kripal, J. *The Super Natural: A New Vision of the Unexplained*. New York: Tarcher Perigee, 2016.
[58] PU, p. 85-130. See also Barnard, William. *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism*. Albany. SUNY, 1997, p. 195-204.

expertise in shifting subjective states, offering insights that hold relevance across different cultural settings. Cultural norms and expectations may shape individuals' predispositions towards certain experiences while inhibiting others, yet Hufford, James, and Turner all argue that these experiences share a fundamental similarity that exceeds cultural and interpretative differences. For further example, the content of dreams is highly personalized to an individual in a culture in a specific place in time. Yet all the while, the experience of dreaming itself is common across cultures. Nonetheless, dreams, mediumship, and other nonordinary conscious phenomena are relegated to the fringes of the physicalist's episteme. The knowledge that comes from dreams, from extrasensory perception, from visions, or from a spiritual experience is not really knowledge from a materialist's perspective.

In contrast, James takes seriously the knowledge that can be gained through religious experience and how it shares many features with psi phenomena:

> It is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call "something there," more deep and more general than any of the particular "senses" by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed… So far as religious conceptions were able to touch this reality feeling, they would be believed in spite of criticism, even though they might be so vague and remote as to be almost unimaginable, even though they might be non-entities in point of whatness as Kant makes the objects of his moral-theology to be (*VRE,* p. 55)

According to James, religious experience involves a vague sense of deeper reality that cannot be discounted, a "sense" that can even involve an indefinite moral imperative. Whereas dogmatic scientists, anthropologists, and theologies are suspicious if not outright dismissive of firsthand religiousness unmediated by reason, James is willing to argue for their value. James posits a "More"; — a deeper reality than what is ordinarily

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perceived — in order to explain the phenomenon of consciousness. He suggests this postulate would allow for a more faithful depiction of what people around the world commonly experience.[59] This is also James's unique answer to the question, "where does religion come from?" To further examine how he answers this, I will briefly examine how anthropologists and religious studies scholars have approached this question.

According to Max Weber, the rationalization and intellectualization that characterize modern culture has resulted in an epistemological situation that is very different from that of earlier ages. He points out that in former times it was believed that in order to obtain full knowledge of and mastery over nature it would be necessary to have "recourse to magical means" and "to implore the spirits".[60] Weber contrasted this to the modern technological era in which "there are no mysterious, incalculable forces that come into play, but rather … one can, in principle, master all things by calculation".[61] According to Weber and many social scientists of the modern era, if you want to understand how a complex system works, you can reduce it to its component parts, its structures and functions. This echoes the mechanistic view of life as espoused by Mettrie in the 1700s. We can see this episteme trickling into the social sciences as we consider the theories of religion that are espoused by the founding fathers of anthropology.

[59] HI, p. 86-93.
[60] Weber, Max. *Science As a Vocation*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1919, p. 139.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 State of the Social Sciences

For E.B. Tylor, the belief in spiritual beings arises because early humans misinterpreted dreams and other altered states of consciousness as real experiences. In Tylor's terminology, "religion" and all these encounters with "spirit" are little more than a "survival", something that is irrational and redundant in the modern world.[62] For Bronislaw Malinowski, religion is self-delusion. Specifically, religion is the "affirmation that death is not real, that man has a soul and that this is immortal, [and] arises out of a deep need to deny personal destruction" (Malinowski 1954, p. 45).[63] According to Malinowski, any talk of spirit within religion is a fantasy that is "more akin to daydreaming and wish fulfillment" than to science.[64] Like Sigmund Freud, Malinowski brands magic as a "perpetuation of falsehoods" or in James Frazer's vivid phrasing, it is the "bastard sister" of science.[65] Belief in spirits has also been explained as that which gives a moral explanation for misfortune and coincidence, or psychosocially it can be seen as a means of making people feel they have power in things beyond their control.[66] Those who continue to hold beliefs in spirits, magic, or miraculous events are often

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[62] Tylor, Edward Burnett. *Primitive Culture: Researches Into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art* and Custom. 1st American, from the 2d English ed. Boston: Estes & Lauriat, 1874, chapters XII-XVII.

[63] Sometimes referred to as a "terror management theory" of religion.

[64] Malinowski, Bronislaw, et al. *Magic, Science and Religion: And Other Essays*. Anchor books ed. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday. 1954, p. 43. See also Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and its Discontents.* 1962, p. 30-31.

[65] Frazer, James George. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion,* abridged ed. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922, p. 53a. Freud says, religious ideas have arisen from ... the necessity of protecting oneself from the crushingly superior force of nature" (Freud, *Future of an Illusion,* 1964, p. 30).

[66] Evans-Pritchard, E. E. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. 1st ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937. Hume also says, "the primary religion of mankind arises chiefly from an anxious fear" (Hume 1957, p. 65).

labeled as uncivilized, barbarous, or even psychologically disturbed – and it is even worse if you are an academic who holds these beliefs.[67]

Early anthropological theorists also sought to differentiate our "religion" from their "magic", by labeling "other" practices as primitive fetishism, idol worship, or savage superstition. Another tactic was to intellectually bracket what "they" do as magic, and what "we" do is religious.[68] This bracketing has become a central feature of social science approaches, as explained by Evans-Pritchard: "As I understand the matter, there is no possibility of knowing whether the spiritual beings of primitive religions or of any others have any existence or not, and since that is the case [the anthropologist] cannot take the question into consideration" (E. E Pritchard 1972, p. 17). This methodological bracketing of the ontological status of spirits effectively shut down the debate within anthropology on whether spirits exist within anthropology. However, more recently, Jack Hunter argues that we need to reexamine this issue, noting that this ontological bracketing is a "security blanket" that "protects and reinforces the mainstream consensus reality" (Hunter 2015, p. 16). It allows academics to bracket "other" systems as just "beliefs", which stand in contrast to the western system founded on empirical "facts" and science. This bracketing is presented as an attempt to be neutral, allowing scholars to bring spirits into academic discourse without needing to enter into debate about the reality of such spirits. But the underlying assumptions have started to affect how we interpret and understand ethnographic data.

Another instantiation of this intellectual bracketing is Jeanne Favret-Saada's (1980) conclusion from her study of French witchcraft:

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[67] Luhrmann, Tanya. *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1989, p. 3-19, p. 283-297. For more, see also Turner 1993 and Larsen, Timothy. *The Slain God*, 2014.
[68] As coined by Husserl, E. *Ideas: general introduction to pure phenomenology.* [Trans. by W. R. B. Gibson]. Macmillan, 1931.

"witches don't exist but witchcraft does".[69] Anthropologists are "permitted"
to engage in a discourse about witchcraft and the beliefs and practices built
around, which they realize are very real in people's lives, but the
implication remains that the phenomenon in question does not exist.[70] There
remains a gulf between the native and the anthropologist. By relativizing
other cultures and adopting a distanced it-is-true-for-them stance,
anthropologists place themselves in a position of authority outside of the
culture they are investigating.

Some anthropologists, such as Stewart Guthrie, argue that beliefs in
spirits emerge from our innate cognitive capacity to detect anthropomorphic
features in the world.[71] From this cognitivist view, spirits have no external
reality beyond the misused attribution of patterns and agency to chaotic
systems.[72] Rather, in this perspective, the religious experience comes from
cognitive misunderstandings combined with a lack of scientific understandings
about the way the brain works- If we perceive there are spirits in the
environment, it is a cognitive mishap equivalent to mistaking the shapes of
clouds for an elephant in the sky. Other cognitivist explanations, such as
Justin Barrett's hyper-active agency detection theory, posits that the human
brain may have evolved under divine guidance in such a way that it is
receptive to religious experience. Barrett explains that "part of the reason
people believe in gods, ghosts, and goblins" comes from "the way in which our
minds, particularly our *agency detection device* functions. Our agency
detection device suffers from some hyperactivity… making it prone to find
agents around us, including supernatural agents" which "encourages the

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[69] For more, see Husserl on bracketing and 'epoche' and Jackson, Michael. *Things as They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, p. 11.
[70] Turner, Edith. "The Reality of Spirts: A Tabooed or Permitted Field of Study?", 1993.
[71] Linked to psychological phenomenon known as pareidolia.
[72] Guthrie, Stewart. "Prediction and Feedback May Constrain but Do Not Stop Anthropomorphism." *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 9, no. 1, 2019, p. 90.

generation and spread of god concepts" (2004, p. 31).[73] These cognitivist

theories are critiqued for clinging to physicalism and searching for physical

structures and "devices" in the brain, while discounting the possibility that

a nonphysical reality may really exist.[74]

Overall, there are numerous social-scientific explanations for magico-

religious beliefs, just as there are structural and functional explanations

for mind. Classical and modern theorists have sought to explain the

persistent and widespread belief in spiritual beings with recourse to

cognitive, psychological, or social processes, often leaving no room for a

spiritual reality. Yet, some academics like Jeffrey Kripal are willing to

admit that throughout his decades of studying religious experience he has

come to another conclusion:

> I came to realize, with a growing sense of shock and liberating
> confusion, that many of the psi phenomena that I had been trained to
> ignore or dismiss as legends or pious exaggerations—as "miracle,"
> "folklore," or, worse, "magic"—and separate from true or genuine
> religious experience should not in fact be separated and are quite
> real. They are "real" in the simple sense that they happen (Kripal
> 2020, p. 370).

As modern anthropologist of magic Tanya Luhrmann argues, the popular

physicalist methods that dismiss these types of experiences are not adequate

to the facts. She, like Kripal, speaks to the pressure to deliver what she

refers to as an "atheistic anthropology" even within her account of the

magical beliefs of modern Witchcraft movements. She reports: "I stood to gain

nothing by belief . . . but I stood to lose credibility and career by

adherence" (Luhrmann 1989, p. 321). In general, you can study magic, as long

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[73] Barrett, Justin. *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?.* 2004. Examples of when the HADD is active
include hearing a bump in the night (p. 31), a perception of a wispy form (p. 33), and even the
perception of crop circles (p. 37). Barrett is a "born-does not say that the HADD is the entire
story, and he does dedicate several chapters to explain other important factors, but he does say
that the HADD is the central function in creating "god concepts" and perceptions of these "gods,
ghosts, and goblins" (p. 31).
[74] Turner, Edith. "The Reality of Spirts: A Tabooed or Permitted Field of Study?", 1993, p. 11.

as you do not entertain the thought that what you are studying is anything more than a social phenomenon or psychological coping mechanism.

Here we can see the physicalist episteme shaping the contours of the social sciences. With the exception of a few scholars, there is an implicit assumption that there is a strict separation between matter and consciousness. Consciousness is an epiphenomenon of matter, so its contents are illusory and what is real is reducible to component physical parts. Therefore, the only "real" thing going on in the religious experience are neuron firings. In Paul Marshall's (2014) simple framing, mystical experience was no longer seen as a "window" into reality; it was now seen as a "mirror" reflecting back the cultural traditions and psychological tendencies of the experiencer.[75] Thinking like this, academics will not get closer to understanding consciousness. As renowned physicist Henry Stapp explains, when scientists and philosophers conceptualize the dynamics of consciousness in essentially classical deterministic terms, they cut themselves off from the advantages wrought by modern advances in physics.[76] Stapp, inspired by James, compels us to reexamine the physicalist assumptions in our theories and methods, given that we now know "even the basic precepts of classical mechanics are profoundly incorrect. The successor to classical mechanics, quantum mechanics, allows each man's consciousness to be understood as an integral part of the world" (Stapp 2009, p. 230).[77] The "old science" informed by classical mechanics and Newtonian cause and effect relies on observation so completely that only phenomena that are observable and repeatable can provide reliable contents to science. Similarly, in attempt to be a rigorous

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[75] Paul Marshall, 2014, p. 10 in supplementary material to Marshall, P. "Mystical experiences as windows on reality." In E. F. Kelly, et al., *Beyond Physicalism: Toward Reconciliation of Science and Spirituality,* 2015, p. 39–76.

[76] Stapp, Henry. *Mind, Matter, and Quantum Mechanics*. 3rd ed., Berlin, 2009, p. 233.

[77] Notably, Stapp realized he was only one among numerous physicists to probe the writings of William James and he went on to theorize his own nonlocal theory of mind that unifies the last one hundred years of discoveries in physics with Jamesian psychology.

"science", anthropologists of the 19th and 20th century were taught to approach

fieldwork with detached objectivity.[78] Trying to emulate physics, "the Queen

of the Sciences," the social sciences used the metaphor of the field as a

laboratory in which data was gathered, with minimal interference of

subjective involvement, in order to test hypotheses, and come to "pure"

conclusions.[79] Radical empiricism, on the other hand, not only allows but

encourages the researcher to use their own embodied experience to inform

their fieldwork. It also affords anthropologists the possibility that what is

described by one's informants may in fact be true. In 1990, when Colin

Turnbull published his experience of liminality and bliss among the Mbuti, he

added:

> What is needed for this kind of fieldwork is a technique of
> participation that demands total involvement of our whole being. Indeed
> it is perhaps only when we truly and fully participate in this way that
> we find this essentially subjective approach to be in no way
> incompatible with the more conventional rational, objective, scientific
> approach. On the contrary, they complement each other and that
> complementarity is an absolute requirement if we are to come to any
> full understanding of the social process. It provides a wealth of data
> that could never be acquired by any other means (Turnball 1990, p. 51)

This position is further illustrated in Edith Turner's (1992) discussion of

the *Ihamba* or "tooth" ritual among the Ndembu in Central Africa and healing

events by Claire in an Alaskan village that we will be turning to in the

following section. If radical empiricism was applied to science, including

the social sciences, it would benefit the world of academia. Inspired by

Edith, Tanya Luhrmann makes this point simple when she says that academia

should be in the business of training "skeptical anthropologists", rather

than teaching "skeptical anthropology" (2018, p. 79). The difference she is

trying to draw out here is that skeptical anthropologists examine all data

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[78] Sometimes called "physics-envy".
[79] Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific; an Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*, 1922, p. ix.

with Jamesian openmindedness, whereas skeptical anthropology construes data outside the ethnographer's understanding as inherently flawed.

2.2 Life and Thought of Edith Turner

Edith Turner was born 1921 in England and met her husband, Victor Turner (1920-1983), when she was twenty years old. After a courtship that lasted six months, the Turners married in 1943 and remained together until Victor's death in 1983. Edith Turner explains that she and her husband, another renowned anthropologist, set out to do "orthodox" fieldwork because of their "three children and jobs" (ASSE, p. 37). Edith Turner's work is often overlooked in comparison to her husband's because she did not have a PhD and she did not remain in "orthodox" academic camps for long before challenging the status quo.

In an interview for *Current Anthropology*, Edith claimed that she was "too busy" with her research, teaching, and family to seek a full professorship or a PhD (2000, p. 850). Nevertheless, she was quite brilliant and she remained in active conversation with anthropologists. Despite not having her PhD, she received various research grants from academic institutions including the University of Virginia and the National Science Foundation. Over her lifetime, Edith Turner conducted fieldwork in more places than most anthropologists of her generation. In addition to her well known fieldwork among the Ndembu of Zambia (1951-1954), she also studied the Bagisu of Uganda (1966), pilgrimage sites in Mexico (1969, 1970), and pilgrimages in Ireland (1971, 1972). Throughout her life she also studied shrines in India and Sri Lanka (1979), Brazilian carnival and Afro-Brazilian cults (1979), Israeli rituals (1980), Japanese ritual and theater (1981), Yaqui ritual (1981, 1986), Israel pilgrimages (1983), African American healing churches (1985), Civil War reenactments (1986-87), Korean

shamanism (1987), Iñupiat festivals (1987–1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993), suburban American rituals, ritual of the Saami of Kola Peninsula in Russia (1993), commemorations of the 150th anniversary of the potato famine in Ireland (1995), and Christian groups in the United States (1996).

Reflecting back on the course of her career, she states "Spirituality stared us all in the face. Black Elk? Lame Deer? Eliade? Who were these? Drops in the ocean, not even "boulders." Vic and I denied ourselves the luxury of these people. At that time, like everybody else, Vic was going to have to be steadily mainstream" (ASSE, p. 37). At most, they could aim to be "brilliantly orthodox," but nothing more for the sake of their job security (ASSE, p. 37). Edith Turner's contemporaries did not entirely shy away from talking about magic, spirit possession, and all sorts of "strange" religious beliefs, but they would typically only approach these topics of study as cultural constructs and the result of structural relationships. In the opening line of her article titled "The Reality of Spirits: A Tabooed or Permitted Field of Study?", she states "The tendency in the past has been for anthropologists to rationalize away the native claim that spirits exist" (1993, p. 2). She continues:

> Again and again anthropologists witness spirit rituals, and again and again some indigenous exegete tries to explain that the spirits are present, and furthermore that rituals are the central events of their society. And the anthropologist proceeds to interpret them differently. There seems to be a kind of force field between the anthropologist and her or his subject matter making it impossible for her or him to come close to it, a kind of religious frigidity. We anthropologists need training to see what the Natives see (E. Turner 1993, p. 11)

Edith Turner's frustration is a response to the form of bracketing in the social sciences that ignores the ontological question altogether, as we saw showcased with Evans-Pritchard. It does not matter if these phenomena are

true or not, it only matters what people believe and do with them.[80] As

Michael Jackson says, "The hidden determinants of belief and action are

ignored in order to describe the implications, intentions, and effects of

what people say, do and hold to be true" (Jackson 1996, p. 11).[81] William

James pointed out the same tendency decades prior when he said:

> We break the order of the world into histories…arts…and sciences; and
> then we begin to feel at home. We make ten thousand separate serial
> orders of it, and on any one of these we react as though the others did
> not exist… We discover among its various parts relations that were
> never given to sense at all… and out of an infinite number of these we
> call certain ones essential and lawgiving and ignore the rest.
> Essential these relations are, but only for our purpose, the other
> relations being just as real and present (James, Reflex Action and
> Theism, 99)

Originally, the academic work of Edith and Victor Turner was aimed at these

commonly agreed upon, lawgiving essential relations- social hierarchy and

cultural constructs within ritual spaces. Their fieldwork originally had

nothing to do with experimental psychology or shamanism. Instead their

starting point was from fieldwork with indigenous people. They slowly became

a part of the struggle taking place in this stage of anthropology in the

1900s: one side pushing for more precise and scientific language, the other

side crying for the mysterious but powerful weight of liminality and

experience. Through this battle, Edith Turner describes how the discipline of

anthropology had to open up to embrace spirituality and personal embodied

experience. This is not to say her writings focused solely on paranormal

experiences. Her writings contain a beautifully balanced mix that can only

blossom out of the understanding that "the structures are important… but

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[80] Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, Oxford, [1965] 1972.
[81] Edith Turner frequently quotes and responds to Jackson, *Things as They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology*, 1996.

alongside is also required a sense of the progression, the process, the body"
(Engelke 2000, p. 850, quoting a discussion with Edith Turner).

Like James, Edith Turner's "object" of study was living human beings
and the lives they lived, what she referred to as "the lived". "The lived"
can never be a clearly defined "object". Instead, the lived are real people
with real lives; people whose beliefs should be taken seriously on their own
terms. Realizing the pragmatists' truth, she began to critique the bracketed
approach anthropologists often take to fieldwork. From this more mainstream
approach, if interlocutors experience trance or possession, then they should
be regarded as engaging in, for example, an unconscious response to address
their marginalized status within various sexual and social hierarchies. The
mainstream approach is to focus the analysis on this level of interpersonal
and intrapersonal relations; Turner realized that delving too deeply into
ontological questions might signal to others that she had psychological
issues of her own and potentially put her livelihood at risk. Even her own
husband urged her to stay on the "safe side" of academia. This is where her
approach to ethnography differed from her husband's. Like a true radical
empiricist who will "not deny anything that is experienced" (WTB, 25), she
unabashedly writes, "It's true that I once had an experience of religion,
after which I didn't see the point of disbelieving other people's
experiences" (E. Turner 1992, p. xiii). After her experience, or as Jeffrey
Kripal may say her "flip", she refused to locate human knowledge exclusively
at the level of language, politics, and social constructs. She writes, "It is
important at last to find out what this psi, this chi, this wakan, this
shamanic gift is. We do indeed need to get close to it to know it, and
closeness is now of the essence" (ASSE, p. 55). A paradigmatic case of her
consequent experiential engagement with data outside the frame of an

anthropologist's understanding is her account of participation in an Ndembu healing ritual in central Africa.[82]

The Turners' respective accounts of the Ihamba healing ritual of the Ndembu of Zambia in the 1950s are discussed at length in both Victor Turner's (1968) *The Drums of Affliction* and in Edith Turner's (1992) *Experiencing Ritual*. Notably, Victor Turner refrained from including his personal emotions with his ethnographic observations. In contrast, Edith Turner increasingly did not expunge her sentiments and experiences from her ethnographic observations. In Victor's interpretation of the healing ritual where the healer extracted a human tooth lodged in the victim's body, he explains the phenomena as a "representation of hidden animosities of the village" (Turner 1968, p. 172). His account gives the impression that once the social dimensions of the ritual have been parsed out, the religious dimension can be discounted. However, she was not at peace with this detached method and this life-dulling account. She writes that Victor "regarded the symbolism of Ihamba as a mixture of moving poetry and undoubted hocus pocus" (E. Turner, 1992, p. 8). In later interviews, she also critiques Victor's account as "practically analyzing away the true meaning of the Ihamba ritual" (Engelke 2000, p. 850).[83]

After the death of her husband, Edith Turner returned to Zambia in 1985 to observe the Ihamba ritual once more. This time, she "participated instead of *merely* watching" (E. Turner 1992, p. 2) and she walked away convinced that "it is time we recognize the ability to experience different levels of

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[82] Turner, Edith. *Experiencing Ritual*, *A New Interpretation of African Healing.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992, p. 2.
[83] See Engelke, M. "An Interview with Edith Turner." *Current Anthropology* 41, no. 5, 2000, p. 843–52.
[83] Turner, Edith. *The Spirit and the Drum: A Memoir of Africa.* Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987.

reality as one of the normal human abilities and place it where it belongs, central to the study of ritual" (E. Turner 1992, p. 94).[84] As for her job as an ethnographer, she began to relax the detached-observer imperative. She realized that although it is outside the status quo, she must "drop that criticality,"[85] (Engelke 2000, p. 850) bridge the gap, "enter the culture", and "try to see as the Africans saw" (E. Turner 1986, p.n43).[86] This shift in her approach led her to ask questions about the spirituality of religion and eventually to the understanding of spiritual healing. Thus, in contrast, foreshadowing her stand that spirits are "real", when Edith Turner writes about the same healing ritual two decades later, she earnestly describes a "giant thing emerging from the flesh of her back" (E. Turner 2005, p. 166). Notably, Edith Turner refused to belittle this event in her ethnographic report by interpreting it in terms of "village animosities" and instead shamelessly asserts that a "giant thing...was a large gray blob about six inches across, a deep gray opaque thing emerging as a sphere" was something that physically existed and was actually extracted by the healer (E. Turner 1998, p. 149).

Using our Jamesian categories, we can understand that the knowledge-by-acquaintance aspect of Edith's experience in the Ihamba ritual manifested as the self-existing, "giant grey blob". Witnessing this gave her a categorically distinct form of information that she could never have gained from decades of textual studies on the rituals of the Ihamba. It was her knowledge-about the dynamics of ritual, as well as her memories and training in anthropologic theory, that seamlessly interwove this sight into an experience that had context, meaning, and significance.[87] While meaning and

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[84] Ibid.
[85] Engelke, M. "An Interview with Edith Turner." *Current Anthropology* 41, no. 5, 2000, p. 843–52.
[86] Turner, Edith. *The Spirit and the Drum: A Memoir of Africa*, 1987.
[87] Because all knowledge is a fusion of both kinds of knowing.

significance are hallmarks of knowledge-about, Edith Turner reminds us that the meaningfulness she felt at the climax of that ritual was *immediate* and powerfully felt.

Edith Turner harnessed the fact that we cannot do anthropology and religious studies like we do science to her advantage. Often in science, whether you are studying atoms, fruit flies or volcanos, human experiences hold little significance to the subjects under examination. A day for you in the lab is a multitude of days for a fruit fly or a yeast colony. Even in field sciences like ecology, a single human life is a mere blink in the context of geologic time. Anthropological field work is a unique discipline because it operates on a timescale that aligns with human experience. Consequently, anthropology necessitates, or perhaps enjoys the privilege of, employing a distinct methodological approach. The anthropologist's method can be immersive and the primary instrument for investigation is the experience of their own being.

James's prism analogy along with Edith Turner's reflections give us a unique way of understanding the anthropologist's challenge. Our selective knowledge-about will siphon our experiential understandings. For example, Scott Hutson, studying the sociology of ravers, observes that whether or not an individual couches their experience as spiritual depends on if they have a religious tradition in which to frame their experience (Hutson 2000, p. 36-45).[88] Similarly, anthropologists will interpret their religious experience as meaningful only when there is a scientific-looking theory that provides a credible interpretative frame. This is what Peter Berger meant when he explained that it is not surprising that some academics in the study of

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[88] Hutson, Scott R. "The Rave: Spiritual Healing in Modern Western Subcultures" *Anthropological Quarterly 3*, no. 1, 2000, p. 35-49.

religion opt for an atheistic account of religion, thinking there is no way

of explaining it within proper sociological discourse.[89] James's categories

are useful here too. No matter how powerful the influx is of the light

through the stained glass, it is always fused with the "coloration" of

knowledge-about and thus is structured by the experiencer's psychological and

social categories and concepts of understanding. This also helps explain a

point Edith Turner makes when describing the dissonance in Victor Turner's

experience and response to the extraction of the tooth spirit in the Ihamba

ritual when she says, "Vic himself felt the 'drawing out', then he put it in

social and psychological terms" (1992, p. 73).[90] Beyond the anthropologist's

awareness, background assumptions are shaping knowledge-by-acquaintance into

forms that one is trained to perceive. And these assumptions are often that

of physicalism. Yet, according to James and Edith Turner, whatever forms to

which the interpretive act condenses these extraordinary experiences, there

is still air bursting through the culturally constructed shape of the organ

pipes.

Though this paper will not focus on Victor Turner as much as Edith

Turner, it is important to note that there is evidence that Victor Turner's

public perspective became increasingly aligned with Edith Turner's before his

death in 1983. His early focus on processes and drama provided him an

academically accepted groundwork for his later focus on embodied religious

experience, even while religion remained popularly defined as "beliefs" which

could be chalked up to mere illusory imaginings. In his last book before his

death, he claims "that whatever the sociological framings of the event…it is

possible that the experiences within a ritual are indeed informed with powers

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[89] Berger, Peter. *Questions of Faith: A Skeptical Affirmation of Christianity*. Malden, MA:
Blackwell Pub, 2004.
[90] Turner, Edith. *Experiencing Ritual*, *A New Interpretation of African Healing.* 1992, p. 73.

both transcendental and immanent" (V. Turner 1982, p. 80). He goes on to claim that most anthropological studies of ritual, including his own, have failed to take this into account.[91] It is this openness to the ontological reality of spiritual powers that Edith Turner affirms even more forcefully, after his death.

2.3 Radical Empiricism as an Anthropological Method: Edith Turner

Edith Turner says to describe the ineffable nature of "spirit" may be to miss the point: "it is very nearly beyond words… But the hands feel it." (HFI, p. 232). James's and Edith Turner's account of religious experience are intrinsically embodied. Religion is not treated as simply a set of beliefs, but as a personal experience in the body.

Edith Turner did not treat the people she studied as deluded specimen "objects" but rather as coeval *subjects* and she believed that their experiences were worthy of rigorous consideration.[92] I would suggest that like Edith Turner, researchers within the human sciences should strive to be reflexively self-aware and acknowledge their own assumptions and biases in order to foster a healthy skepticism and enrich discussions. The goal for fieldwork is not to advocate for a particular perspective but to engage authentically and openly with the phenomenon under investigation. Those being studied could potentially become collaborative partners in the research process rather than mere objects to be interpreted and explained. As Johannes Fabian (1983) pointed out, interlocutors are "coeval" participants in the research endeavor, characterized by shared presence, embodiment, and dialogue. Turner urges anthropologists to see that the assumption of superior knowledge is never a good starting point. Humility, and a high degree of

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[91] Turner, Victor. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982, p. 80
[92] Turner, E. *HFI*, p. xxiv.

reflexive insight, as well as a real understanding of the phenomena being studied, are needed in fieldwork. This attitude is clear in the personal and professional field journals of Edith Turner. Turner's field journals are filled with personal humility and the radical empiricist temperament. She even directly says:

> To Claire and the others, the perception of these workings was a familiar thing. These healers knew, as they were never tired of telling me. I recognized that; I knew a little too and found that what I have just described was not a hypothesis but an empirical phenomenon, in the category of radical empiricism. I cannot say if I understand exactly what happens, and I have been using personal intuition as much as anything else to probe and guess at it (E. Turner 2006, p. 186)[93]

Like James, Edith Turner's writing invites us to consider how the vagueness and the use of metaphor are often better fitted to the nuanced complexities inherent in experience that psychologists, religious scholars, and anthropologists all find themselves attempting to address. If interlocutors experience trance or possession, do we really have to limit ourselves to seeing these phenomena as, for example, an unconscious attempt to engage an unconscious response to address their marginalized status within sexual and social hierarchies? The mainstream approach is to focus analysis on this level; but perhaps that methodological truncation itself reveals something about us researchers, in that delving too deeply might indicate our own psychological issues or jeopardize our credibility.[94]

Edith Turner argues that Geertz' thick description is powerful when paired with an understanding of "textured historicity". Rather than the assumption that more data about what the senses perceive leads to a better model of reality, for Edith Turner the thickness of her descriptions is meant

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[93] Turner, Edith. "Searching for Healing: The Arctic" in *Heart of Lightness: The Life Story of an Anthropologist.* 1st ed. New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2006, p. 81.
[94] ASSE, p. 51; Turner, Edith. *The Reality of Spirits: A Tabooed or Permitted Field of Study?,* 1993, p. 11.

to enable long-term scholarship in the field.[95] She is aware that language can lead us astray. As James notes in *the Principles,* language is "sluggish," "atomistic," and "works against our perception of truth" by "turning percepts into concepts" (PP 1. 124). On the other hand, both Edith Turner and James stress that language can also serve a creative, and ultimately enriching function. James, for example, viewed language similarly to how Freud viewed civilization: indispensable but bound to be problematic (Freud 1961, p. 30-31; PP 1.445),[96] in that what we often forget is that the descriptions of our experiences are never identical to the fullness of the experiences themselves.

Another inspiration Edith Turner drew from James is apparent from her 2006 writing in which she reflects on her personal experiences in Africa in 1985. She states that she "began to see the brain as possessing another function that we have not spotted with the scanners, which might be regarded as a kind of radio transmitter and receiver to and from regions with which we would otherwise have no communication: in other words, a spiritual receiver and transmitter" (E. Turner 2006, p. 178).[97] Here, like in James's writing, we see Edith Turner explicitly advocate for a transmissive theory of mind. She suggests that a transmissive mind has explanatory power that "would account for messages that saints and psychics receive telepathically, and the like" (E. Turner 2006, p. 178). If read carefully, we can also distill from these words her answer to the perennial question of where religion comes from. James and Turner both argue that we all have the capacity for religious or noetic experience because it is "written in" to everything that is. She says "we are endowed with a permeable psyche. It may dawn on one that this

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[95] Turner, Edith, "The Reality of Spirits: a Tabooed or Permitted Field of Study?" 1993, p. 11-12.
[96] Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1962, p. 30-41.
[97] In the interview with Engelke, Edith Turner says she was reading Henri Bergson at the time she met Victor Turner, (p. 276), which helps understand her intellectual proclivities as well as her use of Bergson's "radio analogy".

tendency toward religion is inborn, an endowment, a biological

predisposition, a propensity, existing for just such a purpose, the

communication with spirits (who also are nature)" (ASSE, p. 55).

Turner was unique in that she did not reduce noetic phenomena to, for

example, a culturally determined attempt to gain power and control, nor did

she fetishize them as paranormal experiences that only happen to special

people. Instead, she talked about them as real experiences that happen within

a body. When she drank the Minginju medicine in the Ihamba ritual, she hints

that in altered states, it is not so much that perception itself shifts, but

rather that these altered states adjust what is possible to perceive.[98] In the

Ihamba ritual, the "radio" has not fundamentally changed, but rather, the

channel in which data is coming and going has been altered. In Western

scientific thought, altered states of consciousness have historically been

marginalized in favor of non-altered states.[99] Non-altered states are

perceived as offering more "objective" insights into reality, while altered

states are often viewed as hindering the perception of truth. However, both

William James and Edith Turner challenge this understanding. Turner's

description of her encounter with the Ihamba spirit provides a compelling

illustration. In her annotations, Turner recounts the Ndembu belief that the

visibility of the musalu, or spirit, is facilitated by Munginju medicine,

typically consumed in the form of pounded leaf medicine. Turner's own

experience during the Ihamba ritual indicates her consumption of a substance

that altered her consciousness:

> Singleton began to medicate his chiyanga doctors. Each drank a cupful
> of the leaf medicine; a cup was handed to me and I drank the liquid,
> which tasted pleasantly of fresh leaves. Immediately, my head fired up
> and swam. The drink contained no alcohol, but I felt the same

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[98] Turner, Edith. *Experiencing Ritual*, *A New Interpretation of African Healing.* 1992, p. 131.
[99] See Cardeña, E. The Experimental Evidence For Parapsychological Phenomena: A Review. *American Psychologist*, 73, no.5, 2018, p. 663-667.

recognizably loosening effect as before. Nevertheless, I went on writing my field notes with no change in legibility (E. Turner 1992, p. 131)

James indicates how the filter theory can help make sense of experiences in altered states, whether they are described as "descending into a fog" as in Leonora Piper's case, or as experienced by Edith Turner after ingesting the Minginju medicine. James says:

> Some persons have naturally a very wide, others a very narrow, field of consciousness… the lowering of the psycho-physical threshold as the coming and going of the tide. When the tide goes out, and the water level falls, things previously submerged become visible. When the psycho-physical barrier falls, there is "an immense spreading of the margin of the field, so that knowledge ordinarily transmarginal would become included, and the ordinary margin would grow more central (James, Collected Essays and Reviews, p. 500)[100]

In Edith Turner's 2016 publication titled, "Anthropologists and Healers-Radical Empiricists", she reflects on the work of Claire, a psychic healer from Alaska. As the title claims, Edith Turner argues that "healers such as Claire are what I call 'radical empiricists': they go by what their hands feel and what they see with their eyes, or their second sight" (E. Turner 2016, p. 129).[101]

Inspired by Edith Turner, modern anthropologist Jack Hunter coined the term "ontological flooding" to describe the openness to the experience of others that can form part of participative research.[102] He coins this term "flooding" to contrast the sense of anthropological "brackets" or dams that academics put up to hold back the anomalous data that is pushing in all the time. His idea is that instead of putting those brackets up, we let them go; we open the dams:

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[100] See also William James, WTB, pg. 23.
[101] Turner, Edith. 2016. "Anthropologists and Healers—Radical Empiricists." *Social Analysis* 60 (1), p. 129–39.
[102] See Jack Hunter's 2018 article, "Reflecting on Edith Turner's Work and Influence" in the Journal for the Study of Religious Experience, p. 102-104.

> Rather than bracketing out questions of ontology for fear that they might lead to truths that cannot fit into the established order of Western academia's dominant ontology, I suggest that we essentially open the flood gates of ontological possibilities. This places all ontologies on an equal footing, so that while ontological bracketing protects and reinforces the mainstream consensus reality, what we might call ontological flooding destabilizes it, and opens it up to questions, exploration, and expansion… (Hunter 2015, p. 16)

If we can have an inclusive framework that brings things in, instead of putting brackets up and excluding different perspectives, then we might move closer to understanding reality (Hunter 2015).[103] As our authors suggest, we should be open to as many possibilities we can and in this way, we can begin to understand the nuance and complexity of things without trying to force them into a reductive or single explanation.

But this does not mean we should be less critical and accept everything as truth. If anything, this would mean we have to be more critical in order to deal with the complexity. And as James, Turner, and Jack Hunter have argued, we should be particularly wary of any model that claims to be final and definitive as a complete explanation. As radical empiricists, the authors insist that no one ever has a complete picture. All of our models and frameworks are human constructions and will be fallible. In the words of James, even our most precious facts ought to be regarded as "tenable hypotheses".[104]

In Hunter's case, his admiration for Edith Turner compelled him to take up research with a physical mediumship circle near Bristol. He realized that the dominant explanatory framework to evaluate medium circles has been in terms of fraud or another form of reductionism. His research in medium circles allowed him to share some of the physical sensations of being taken

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[103] Hunter was inspired when Fort wrote "Our expression is that the New Dominant (paradigm), of Wider Inclusions, is now manifesting throughout the world, and that the old Exclusionism is everywhere breaking down" (Fort, 2008).
[104] James, *PP*, p. 303.

over by a "manifesting" spirit.[105] By paying attention to somatic data as well as to narratives and ideology, Hunter came to a similar conclusion as James and Edith Turner: that mediumship need not rest on trickery or fraud. A developing medium does not need to fake or imagine their experience; there is an objective, physical aspect to possession, however this might then be interpreted. Similarly, William Barnard in his study of the Santo Daime tradition, a syncretic Spiritist religion in Brazil, underwent initiation as a medium, learning first-hand what it feels like to use spiritual energy to help discarnate spirits.[106] The mode of learning was through somatic experience rather than doctrinal teaching, so without participation Barnard's understanding of mediumistic works would have been very much diminished. Similarly, Edith Turner's most profound experiences were when she aimed to participate rather than observe.[107]

Edith Turner also wonders whether there is something that ontologically underlies theses of highly individualized experiences, asking, "Is religion, then, that same consciousness of a spiritual power that passes through and through everything in the universe—matter, living things, animals, and humans—part and parcel of all of nature as a matter of course?" (ASSE, p. 55). Powerful and profound religious and paranormal experiences point toward a tapestry of existence that is woven from threads extending beyond the bounds of the physical realm. They invite us to contemplate a broader framework, one that encompasses not only the tangible world but also the ethereal presence of spiritual beings and the enigmatic dimensions beyond our ordinary level of perception.

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[105] Hunter, Jack. *Manifesting Spirits*, 2021.
[106] Barnard, William. *Liquid Light*, 2022, p. 243-267.
[107] Edith Turner, "Postscript: Anthropologists and Healers—Radical Empiricists," Social Analysis 60, no. 1, 2016, p. 129-39. See also Engelke's interview with Edith Turner.

2.4 Modern Examinations of Core Experiences

Throughout James's work in psychical research, he (like other members of the SPR) adhered to two basic principles: first, to investigate psychic phenomena according to the methods and criteria of science; and second, to enlarge the scope of science to include the study of phenomena that are random, nonrepeatable, and dependent on unusual personal capacities and dispositions (McDermott, Introduction to EPR, xix). The commitment to these two principles is also carried on by modern academics like Edith Turner, Jack Hunter, and Jessica Utts. Since 1990, Edith Turner has been interested in psi phenomena and asking questions like "What right has anthropology's authority system to dictate in any way whether or not psi exists?" (ASSE, p. 53). She defines psi to mean "not only telepathy and present-day psychic crafts, but the possibility of conveying energy to a person in healing and, generally, the gifts of a shaman, finding lost objects and people, changing the weather, speaking with the dead, and second sight" (ASSE, p. 56, footnote 4). Turner advocates for a meta-analysis of both ethnographic and empirical studies on spirituality and psi as these faculties appear in the lives of different people all over the world. She argues that when these accounts become increasingly commonplace, scientists will be compelled to accept the human being as spirit-involved. Turner encourages us that once this is achieved, we can lay out the characteristics of psi, spirits, and become familiar with them (ASSE, p. 55).

In line with Turner's call for action, a growing body of objective evidence derived from laboratory studies now substantiates the observable and reproducible nature of these phenomena.[108] For instance, one such phenomenon, known as remote viewing, enables individuals to access mental impressions concerning nonlocal phenomena, distant people and places. Notably, the United

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[108] For a comprehensive overview, refer to Cardeña, E. The Experimental Evidence For Parapsychological Phenomena: A Review. *American Psychologist*, 73, no. 5, 2018, p. 663- 667.

States military conducted a formal remote viewing program spanning over two decades. Drs. May and Marwaha meticulously analyzed the program's released data, revealing that out of 504 separate missions conducted from 1973 to 1995, remote viewing yielded "*actionable intelligence"*, prompting 89 percent of the clients to request additional missions.[109] Their analysis underscores the significance of the Star Gate data, indicating that the information that psi represents is a scientifically validated phenomenon. Jessica Utts is a statistics professor at the University of California, Irvine, and has been involved with government funded research into psi phenomena for decades. She has been hired by the Central Intelligence Agency and Defense Intelligence Agency to carry out the statistical analysis of the psychical research done at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI).[110] Jessica Utts's conviction is clear in her 2016 presidential address to the American Statistical Association:

> The data in support of precognition and possibly other related phenomena are quite strong statistically and would be widely accepted if they pertained to something more mundane. Yet, most scientists reject the possible reality of these abilities without ever looking at data! I ask them what original research they have read, and they mostly admit that they haven't read any! Now there is a definition of pseudoscience— basing conclusions on belief, rather than data! (p. 1379)

The statistician's claim is that of the radical empiricist. Without acknowledging the fallibility of hypotheses and beliefs, scientists and social scientists often find themselves ignoring data.[111] In the case of psi experiences, the data ignored is rigorously tested by the government and

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[109] Edwin, M., and Marwaha, S. The Star Gate Archives: Reports of the US Government Sponsored Psi Program –1972-1995. *Volume 2: Remote Viewing* (1985-1995). See also Schwartz, Gary E. "William James and the Search for Scientific Evidence of Life After Death Past, Present, and Possible Future." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 17, no. 11–12, 2010, p. 121–52.
[110] Subsequently known as the SAIC
[111] Even Clifford would likely be critical of the outright dismissal of psi phenomena. Holding an unexamined belief that the mind is materialistic and incapable of psi experience is akin to stealing from society, because "the danger to society is not merely that it should believe wrong things, though that is great enough, but that it should become credulous, and lose the habit of testing things and inquiring into them; for then it must sink back into savagery"(Clifford, *Ethics of Belief*, p. 554).

found to be significant and repeatable.[112] Utts explains that the evidence that nonlocal perception is so strong it would be statistically and scientifically unreasonable to deny it.[113] When asked in an interview which theoretical explanations she thinks most plausible, she too points to William James's transmissive theory of mind.[114] Given that this discovery resonates with the experiences of psi phenomena that are reported by cultures all over the world throughout time, James would argue that these experiences are normal and are ripe for academic consideration. In a 2018 article, Luhrmann claims that "the real ontological challenge" of our time is not just for the anthropologist to take seriously their own uncertainty about what is real, but through a confrontation with "radical otherness" to "alter our understanding of the possible, our sense of moral purpose, and our capacity to offer hope" (2018, p. 81).[115] In order to meet this challenge, we do not have to reinvent the wheel. Rather, we can look to established models such as those of William James and Edith Turner, whose theories and methods offer ways to heed Luhrmann's call to action. Edith Turner, for example, maintains that "experience is primary and that the objectified mind, that is, laws and culture were secondary" (Turner and Bruner 1986, p. 5). Edith Turner suggests that we should go by experience, think about what we experience, and develop our abilities to experience in different ways.[116]

2.5 Conclusion

Edith Turner's anthropological method and continued interest in psychical research highlights intriguing parallels with James's philosophy.

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[112] Utts, Jessica. "An Assessment of the Evidence for Psychic Functioning 1." *The Journal of Parapsychology* 82, 2018, p. 118–46.
[113] Echoed also by Targ, Russell. *The Reality of ESP: A Physicist's Proof of Psychic Abilities*, 2012, in which he claims the statistical effect size of the remote viewing experiments was ten times stronger than the National Institute of Health's study of aspirin.
[114] Interview with Jessica Utts found at New Thinking Allowed with Jeffrey Mishlove, "Statistics in Parapsychology with Jessica Utts", YouTube Interview, 34:35, Dec. 2, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WmYGtKB9EEA&t=552s
[115] Luhrmann, Tanya M. "The real ontological challenge." HAU: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 8 (1–2): 2018, p. 79–82.
[116] ASSE, p. 54–55.

Common to all these approaches is the aim to reconcile religion and science; the adoption of a radical empiricist stance; acknowledgment of the inherent fallibility of hypotheses; a heavy reliance on personal and subjective epistemology; and a challenge to the reigning Cartesian mind-body dichotomy. We will now return to James's triplex criteria for evaluating the value of a claim: immediate luminousness, philosophical reasonableness, and moral helpfulness.

As was noted earlier, immediate luminosity is the criterion that acknowledges the value of the experiential component of nonordinary states of awareness. This describes direct, unmediated, self-evident knowledge, and a sense of indubitableness. For example, in the rituals that Edith Turner describes, there is no doubt to the participants that what they experienced was true. However, even unmediated, immediately luminous forms of knowledge do not come "preapproved", but they must also be philosophically reasonable and morally helpful.[117] As James clarifies, visionary experiences, too, must be "sifted, tested, and run the gauntlet of confrontation with the total context of experience" (VRE, p. 338).

To continue the discussion of chapter one on the philosophical reasonableness of adopting a transmissive view of mind, Edith Turner and William James both point out that a materialist, "productive" view of consciousness cannot account for a variety of phenomena. James reminds readers that a productive theory of mind is "not a jot more simple or credible in itself than any other conceivable theory", but rather that "It is only a little more popular" (HI, p. 22).[118] For example, as briefly discussed with Jessica Utts's work, the physicalist theory has no means to account for everyday conscious experience, let alone that of visionary experience or psi

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[117] See Barnard, William. *Liquid Light*, 2022, pg. 212-220 for further discussion of these three criteria applied to mystical experiences.
[118] James makes a very similar claim in 1982 [1898], p. 89.

phenomena. Because materialism assumes that conscious experience is nothing more than an emergent property of physical systems, "descending into a fog" and coming back with viable information is nonsensical. Clairvoyance, remote viewing, mediumship, are as illusory as psychedelic visionary experiences and to take these experiences seriously is seen as irrational at best, and at worst, a sign of mental pathologies. Yet, according to the president of the American Statistical Association and countless other physicists and philosophers, psi phenomena and noetic experiences are real. As one author puts it:

> Thousands of field and laboratory studies carried out by competent scientists over the 130-plus years since the founding of the Society for Psychical Research cumulatively provide an overwhelming body of evidence—for those who will take the trouble to study it with an open mind—that these phenomena really do exist as facts of nature (Kelly et al*, Beyond Physicalism*, p. xv)

Advocates of a transmissive view of mind argue that this alternative model aligns equally well with neurobiological data while offering an even more robustly empirical approach by providing explanations for wild or "damned facts" and "rogue phenomena" like visionary experience in altered states of consciousness that physicalist understandings of the mind-brain relationship have no means to account for (James 1890, Vol. 1, p. 4).[119] As we have seen, many academics argue instead for a model of mind in which the brain selectively allows into conscious awareness only what is deemed essential for the individual's daily functioning.[120] James's transmissive theory of mind better accounts for these phenomena and the religious experience writ large. Instances of telepathy, clairvoyance, or various states of visionary or mystical awareness can thus be interpreted as occurrences when the usual

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[119] Marshall, Paul. "Mystical Experiences as Windows on Reality." In *Beyond Physicalism: Toward Reconciliation of Science and Spirituality,* 2015, chapter 2, p. 39-76
[120] New Thinking Allowed with Jeffrey Mishlove, "Statistics in Parapsychology with Jessica Utts", YouTube Interview, 34:35, Dec. 2, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WmYGtKB9EEA&t=552s

"filters" that shield us from conscious awareness of the "mothersea of consciousness" are either removed or lowered. Seen from this perspective, spiritual practice can be a way to change the channel of our experience. In the moments when the threshold is lowered, experiences can be induced that people regard as extremely meaningful and have indubitably real effects. For example, recent studies on the therapeutic effects of psychedelics show that 66% to 86% of people who have taken psychedelics in a therapeutic setting report the experience as "among the most spiritually meaningful in their lives" (Palitsky 2023, p. 744).[121] Yet, productive theories of mind strip altered states and religious experiences writ large of their significance, reducing them to mere linguistic utterances, while also simplifying decision-making processes to purely biological functions. However, James contends that the transmissive theory of the mind/brain relationship paint a more nuanced, vivid, and profound understanding of the human condition as compared to materialist productive theories, while also arguing that the transmissive theory of consciousness is also more morally helpful.

To evaluate James's claims the measure of moral helpfulness of the transmissive theory of consciousness, it is vital to remember why there is such significance placed on safeguarding consciousness from reductionist explanations. Quite a bit hinges on whether consciousness can be explained in reductionist terms. If it turns out that consciousness is ultimately reducible to physiological processes, it would radically challenge our fundamental understanding of ourselves. Worse, if consciousness is nothing but physiology, it can even seem that in some way we do not exist, only physiology does. Our theoretical models are not neutral. Instead, they are at least implicitly an existential struggle with moral repercussions. If our

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[121] Same results were also found in the 14 month follow up study. Clinical psychedelic experience was continuously ranked in the top five most "spiritually significant" event of life. For more see Johnson, M. W. et al. Long-term follow up of psilocybin-facilitated smoking cessation. *Am. J. Drug Alcohol Abuse* 43, 2017, p. 55-60.

models and methods assume a physicalist stance, then human beings are merely "moist robots" infected with the illusion of free will.[122] This existential struggle puts us in a precarious position, akin to grappling with Bishop Berkeley's critique of material substance, where uncertainty arises about whether we have lost everything or nothing at all. It also adds to the intrigue of Nagel's exploration of consciousness. What may appear to be a purely academic inquiry into the reducibility of mind becomes a profound reflection on our identity and can prompt a passionate struggle with our sense of being and purpose. James, Turner, and many other authors outside the scope of this paper have emphasized the transformative magic of transmissive theories of mind. I would suggest that these theories are more morally helpful than a worldview that envisions ourselves as moist robots. They are a source of hope, a catalyst of human flourishing, a repository of empirically validated truths that affirm the reality of freedom, the intrinsic value of human choices, and the boundless depths of human potential.

By now, I hope the methodological advantages of the Jamesian radical empiricist approach are also clear, in that anthropologists can utilize their own experiences as a lens through which to understand the complexities of human culture. Radical empiricism as an ethnographic method enables anthropologists to gain insights into the lived realities of the communities they study, fostering a deeper understanding that transcends mere observation. Thus, as researchers of human nature, we can continue straining to better understand what is uncertain, not to pontificate about predetermined conclusions of a deterministically finished reality, but to engage with an unfinished, incomplete world. This is a world ripe with possibilities and chance, devoid of one final completed explanation. This is a world that we can transform with, as it transforms with us.

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[122] Similarly, Penrose urges us to see that "the mind is not a computer made of meat" (Emperors New Mind, p. 26).

APPENDIX

Works by William James

Pragmatism (PRAG) (1975)

Essays in Radical Empiricism (ERE) (1976)

Pluralistic Universe (PU) (1977)

Will to Believe (WTB) (1896)

Principles of Psychology (PP) (1981)

Varieties of Religious Experience (VRE) (1985)

Essays in Psychical Research (EPR) (1896)

Human Immortality (HI) (1898)

Works by Edith Turner

The Hands Feel It (HFI) (1996)

Advances in the Study of Spirit Experience (ASSE) (2006)

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