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Man and Religious Experience

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MAN AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

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Man, as a complex being, has been examined in many different ways. The object of this study is not only his ontic structure, but also his cognitive ability, moral subjectivity, participation in society and culture-creating activity. One aspect of this is the religiosity of man, which can take different forms and be formed on different foundations. In addition to having a specific set of religious beliefs, targeting specific moral standards and participation in the liturgical and social life of the community of believers, an important element of religiosity may include having of some kind of religious experiences (mystical). A man believes that they are usually associated with the experience of existence and the immediate presence of the Absolute, usually captured in terms of personal being. However, how is this in reality? What, or who, is experienced by a man in a religious experience?

The purpose of this paper is to show that the direct object of religious experience is certainly not God. This conclusion can be based on the results of various forms of human religious experience. So what is it? Below are four basic ways to interpret this phenomenon. It is manifested as a form of expression of the subconscious (W. James), ritual-moral involvement (C. Taylor), noumenal experience (R. Otto, J. Hick) and as a cognitive act (P. Moskal). This paper is based on the analysis of the main works of the above-mentioned authors. It is worth noting that although that they belong to different schools of philosophy, the results of their studies appear to be similar.

It should also be noted that the following discussion takes place at a purely philosophical level. There is always the possibility of what in theology is called “the action of grace”. Without denying the possibility of extraordinary intervention of God, it must be admitted that both conditions derived from faith and from reason lead us to the same conclusion expressed in our thesis.

Religious Experience as an Expression of the Subconscious

One of the first authors to study the religious experiences of people belonging to different religions and cultures was the American pragmatist William James. The main feature of his analysis was to give a naturalistic (psychological) explanation of the phenomenon of religion and its various manifestations. An understanding of religious experience is associated with the concept of religion. He distinguished between institutional and personal religion. The first type of religion is somehow adopted by a man in a form according to tradition and custom. However, this was not of interest to James. Rather, he focused on personal religion, which is based on the feelings, acts and experiences of individuals relating to something that, in their opinion, is considered to be divine. This divinity is understood in a broad sense as something supreme, ultimately powerful and primordial¹.

According to James, the source of religion lies therefore in some type of feelings. Reason plays only a supporting role. This approach is associated with the belief that only human feelings give the possibility of experiencing this mystery as an essential dimension of the world. If man only used reason, this would be unrealistic. The perception of this mystery, however, is important because, as we will see further, it is a specific source of religious experience².

At the core of religion is the inner emotional experience. What it is? James seems to include suddenly-emerging feelings of happiness and a sense of power³. They are a consequence of the different elements present in our psyche: hallucinations of a supernatural world, a sense of purpose, sudden thoughts, experiences of unity and spiritual peace, inspirations, visions, ecstasy and the gift of languages⁴.

¹ W. James, *Doświadczenia religijne*, transl. J. Hempel, Warszawa 1958, p. 7–8, 28–30, 33; S. Kowalczyk, *Bóg w myśli współczesnej. Problematyka Boga i religii u czołowych filozofów współczesnych*, Wrocław 1982, p. 276; M. Piróg, *Williama Jamesa filozofia doświadczenia religijnego*, Katowice 2011, p. 20, 30–31.

² W. James, *Doświadczenia religijne*, p. 391–392, 456; P. Gutowski, *Subiektywne doświadczenie czy więź wspólnotowa? William James i Charles Taylor o religii*, in: Ch. Garbowski, J.P. Hudzik, J. Kłos (ed.), *Charlesa Taylora wizja nowoczesności. Rekonstrukcje i interpretacje*, Warszawa 2012, p. 126.

³ W. James, *Doświadczenia religijne*, p. 45–46, 74–75.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 56–65, 66–67, 109, 116, 260, 432.

James also assigns an important role in the early religious experience to negative spiritual states, which include melancholy, discouragement, fear, sadness, despair, disgust, anger, distrust, doubt, suspicion, anxiety and a sense of sin. When experiencing these situations, a person wishes to get rid of them which, in turn, can lead to some type of religious experience (conversion)⁵. James points out, however, that the simultaneous presence of positive and negative human conditions is often evidence of a personality split between the ideal and the real state. In order to overcome it, one should go in the direction of unification. This unity, however, is not always associated with religious experience, because the process of integration can also move in a different direction⁶.

Religious experience involves a sense of internal energy and happiness that cannot be explained by reason because the range is limited only to the surface of the mental condition. However, factors that form the foundation of religious experience are derived from the deepest layers of a human being. According to James, in trying to explain them we must follow our instincts⁷. The result of the presence of instincts in human nature are mystical states of consciousness which are the root of religious experience. These states are characterized by four mystical qualities: no expression, cognitive ability, instability and passivity. They can take many forms, including: understanding of the importance of something, feeling of being somewhere, dreams, liberating thoughts, states of peace and joy, feeling the presence of someone, passion, vision and specific beliefs⁸. Thus, the phenomenal film and mystical states of religious experience are similar, according to James. Despite this, he seems to distinguish them by linking the first with instincts and the other with the world of human emotions based on instincts.

Clarifying his views, James stresses that the instincts belonging to a shallower layer do not constitute the deepest part of human nature. This, in fact, is controlled by the subconscious mind, which plays a decisive role in religious and mystical experience. It is at the subconscious level that man can communicate with the deity, understood as the spirit of life and power. Religious experience can then take two basic forms. On one hand, this would entail the submission of the subconscious self to the power of the conscious self, on the other hand, the entry of some content from the unconscious to the conscious realm⁹. The human

⁵ Ibidem, p. 135–137, 149, 185, 192, 459; L. Dupre, *Inny wymiar Filozofia religii*, transl. S. Lewandowska-Głuszyńska, Kraków 2003, p. 86.

⁶ W. James, *Doświadczenia religijne*, p. 156–157, 161–162; M. Piróg, *William Jamesa filozofia doświadczenia religijnego*, p. 38–41.

⁷ W. James, *Doświadczenia religijne*, p. 68–70; P. Gutowski, *Subiektywne doświadczenie czy więź wspólnotowa?*, p. 128.

⁸ W. James, *Doświadczenia religijne*, p. 344–348, 358–362, 374; S. Kowalczyk, *Bóg w myśli współczesnej*, p. 281.

⁹ W. James, *Doświadczenia religijne*, p. 92–94, 193–194, 437, 465–466; M. Piróg, *William Jamesa filozofia doświadczenia religijnego*, p. 61–64.

subconscious is, in fact, a conglomeration of memories, thoughts and feelings revealing themselves in consciousness. James leaves open the question of participation of a divine being in this process. He believes that its presence is not necessary. However, if a divine being participates in this process, it will only make use of this data subconsciously¹⁰. It seems that James understands God as a consciousness which is the basis for other consciousnesses and is expressed in them. Our finite consciousness is essential for His constitution and He includes them. God is the most inner-self in this view¹¹.

So we see that James does not want to deny the existence of God. Its presence is not necessary for someone's religious experience through which one experiences the transformation of his life, because they can be explained only by reference to the natural world of the subconscious. However, believers can instinctively identify that world with the divine being that causes a positive impact in the life of human being¹².

It is worth adding that James analyzes the question of God's existence and the veracity of religious experience not only on an intellectual level, but especially in the context of the pragmatic theory of truth – according to which the practical implications of claims are very important. Especially when they open new perspectives for a man and have an impact on his life¹³.

Religious Experience as Ritual-Moral Involvement

The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, one of the most famous modern thinkers, has a special kind of polemic view of W. James. He believes that the views of the American pragmatist respond well to certain trends occurring in Western Christianity in the last centuries. Their expression was the appreciation of the personal religious commitment¹⁴. These changes in the area of religion are somehow the result of the modern understanding of the human being, whose identity is characterized by three main features: interiority (as having an internal depth), affirmation of ordinary life (family and professional life) and an expressive concept of human nature as a source of moral and religious life¹⁵.

¹⁰ W. James, *Doświadczenia religijne*, p. 212–213, 217, 222–223, 248; M. Piróg, *Williama Jamesa filozofia doświadczenia religijnego*, p. 42.46.

¹¹ M. Piróg, *Williama Jamesa filozofia doświadczenia religijnego*, p. 168–169.

¹² W. James, *Doświadczenia religijne*, p. 466–467; Z.J. Zdybicka, *Człowiek i religia. Zarys filozofii religii*, Lublin 1993, p. 80.

¹³ M. Piróg, *Williama Jamesa filozofia doświadczenia religijnego*, p. 80–91.

¹⁴ Ch. Taylor, *Oblicza religii dzisiaj*, transl. A. Lipszyc, Kraków 2002, p. 11–13.

¹⁵ Ch. Taylor, *Źródła podmiotowości. Narodziny tożsamości nowoczesnej*, group transl., Warszawa 2001, p. 4–5; M. Wojewoda, *Pluralizm aksjologiczny i jego implikacje we współczesnej filozofii religii*, Katowice 2010, p. 143.

It seems that Taylor cannot accept these trends, and chooses to focus on the two other currents that exist in Christianity. The first seeks to highlight a complementarity between personal involvement and participation in the worship of the community¹⁶. The second tends to emphasize the need for the filling of God's commandments delivered through Revelation. According to Taylor, there is nothing to prevent the implementation of the traditional commandments combined with personal commitment. Moreover, the combination of these two elements should be the human ideal¹⁷.

By linking the religious experience with the ritual and moral life of the community, Taylor raises four main objections to the concept of James. First, the American pragmatist recognizes this experience only through the prism of the individualistic Protestant tradition. Second, in the description and explanation of religious experience, he does not venture beyond that individualism – the belief that man does not need a religious community in his relationship with God. Third, James does not take into account that this community is built on the sacramental signs and moral practices as a specific form of religious experience. In the end, the dismissive attitude of James to theology and the impossibility of verbalization of religious experience leads to its complete elimination. According to Taylor, a certain type of religious experience is possible only in the situation of sharing it with other people¹⁸.

Taylor holds that the problem of modern times is that religious life has taken on the form described by W. James. Thus, there has been a trend towards individualism in the spiritual and moral dimension, where the main feature is the need for expression¹⁹. Therefore, religious life, which involves man and the whole range of experiences associated with it, should not only be the object of his free choice, but it has to speak to him and be relevant in the context of his personal spiritual and religious development. Emphasizing the individualism of the religious experience leads to relaxation and, consequently, breaks ties with the religious community. This community imposes a framework on man in which he cannot live, because he perceives this framework as an obstacle to an authentic relationship with God and the different forms of expression in everyday life. It should be noted that the link between man and the divine essence is reduced to the level of passionate emotions and feelings. It rejects the reliance on reason and is limited to its dependence on something higher and free disclosure of emotions associated with this fact²⁰.

¹⁶ Ch. Taylor, *Oblicza religii dzisiaj*, p. 14.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 16–17.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 22–27; P. Gutowski, *Subiektywne doświadczenie czy więź wspólnotowa?*, p. 126–127, 129.

¹⁹ Ch. Taylor, *Oblicza religii dzisiaj*, p. 63; P. Gutowski, *Subiektywne doświadczenie czy więź wspólnotowa?*, p. 132–134.

²⁰ Ch. Taylor, *Oblicza religii dzisiaj*, p. 73–74, 76–77.

Taylor, however, cannot be reconciled with such a situation. Therefore, he seems to emphasize that man needs to experience religious community based on the sacraments and a particular form of life. He also reminds us that original, personal insights and spiritual experiences demand continuation and deepening and this is possible only through formal religious practices. In addition, they serve an important function in the disciplining of man in his spiritual development. In addition, a bond with a particular religion or church community is important for yet another reason – human identity. Man is a being who wants to know who he is. That is why he is looking for an item, even religious, to serve him in the process of self-determination, both in the personal and social realms²¹.

In terms of community and the specific forms of religious life, it is worth bearing in mind (especially in the case of Taylor) the fact of religious pluralism. In this context, an important issue seems to be the dialogue between communities of different religions. This results from Taylor's concept of human nature, where the essence of man is the ability to engage in dialogue. In addition, it demands the very nature of religion. In every religion there is a recognition of the absolute. However, this diagnosis is culturally conditioned. Religious expressions are never the final word and no religious tradition is the only one. For this reason, each of them requires an openness and a rejection of ethnocentrism²².

Religious Experience as a Noumenal Experience

The classical approach to religious experience as acts in the noumenal sphere of man and the world can be found in "Holiness", the famous book of the German phenomenologist of religion, Rudolf Otto. He understands religious experience as a feeling of the total superiority of what he calls "the numinosum". There is primarily some irrational element in the numinosum, which is unknowable by concepts. However, Otto adopted a conceptual approach towards this existence. He characterized it as a kind of power piercing the depth of the human soul, as a mysterious being, which not only causes fear in man, but it can also attract and delight²³.

Otto, relating to the intuition of Kant, defines the numinous as a pure *a priori* category. It does this not only because the conceptual description of this mysterious force is not based on sensory experience, but also because the fe-

²¹ Ibidem, p. 85–89.

²² M. Wojewoda, *Pluralizm aksjologiczny i jego implikacje we współczesnej filozofii religii*, p. 147–150.

²³ R. Otto, *Świętość. Elementy irracjonalne w pojęciu bóstwa i ich stosunek do elementów racjonalnych*, transl. B. Kupis, Wrocław ²1993, p. 39–55, 59–67; L. Dupre, *Inny wymiar*, p. 318–319.

elings associated with it are embedded in the depths of the soul and, therefore, characterized by purity, like the Kantian forms of intuition and categories²⁴. So we see that Otto interprets religious experience in terms of feelings (horror or fascination), which evoke a mysterious force to be present in the human soul. His analysis refers to the tradition which has its origin in the thought of "I". Kant based the division of the world into two spheres: noumena (things-in-themselves) and phenomena (phenomena). Religious experiences are on the noumenal level. Their expression is not only morality in the strict sense, but also certain human feelings.

The spirit of Kant's philosophy is not unusual for the analytic philosopher John Hick. According to him, a believer bases his beliefs on certain types of religious experience, which a non-believer does not have²⁵. Hick believes that any experience is conceptual in nature, which requires interpretation by means of concepts ("experience-as"). This conceptual approach to the subject is not something purely theoretical, but should serve practical purposes by the adoption of a critical stance against it, which is appropriate to its meaning. That sense has not only individual things, but also the world as a set of them. Living in the world, man is in a space of meanings which are organized in a hierarchical manner. It should be noted that a lower level of meaningfulness of the world determines the presence of a higher level. What, then, is this hierarchy? At the lowest level, we have to deal with the physical sense which the moral and religious sense is based on. The most interesting (for us) religious sense comes into play when our experience of the world and things are interpreted by religious concepts²⁶.

According to Hick, these religious concepts are valid for man when they are based on relevant experience. This is the reason for religious beliefs, but it does not constitute the proof of truth in the strictest sense. So when a man experiences various existential events in his life and interprets them as signs of God's action demanding an appropriate response from him, he then has a reasonable basis for doing so, in order to be convinced of God's intervention in his life. Of course, this experienced religious meaning is dependent on the variety of spiritual traditions in which the people were raised and where they live. These traditions relate primarily to the different concepts of God, which give meaning to human life and action. Hick believes that there are no true or false religious experiences and beliefs associated with them. The cognitive situation of every religious person is similar. For this reason, it should be assumed that all of these experiences are based on the genuine experience of any one reality. Hick refers here to the Kantian distinction: noumenon (the reality) and the phenomenon (a phenomenon)

²⁴ R. Otto, *Świętość*, p. 131–134; Z. J. Zdybicka, *Człowiek i religia*, p. 251–255.

²⁵ J. Hick, *Argumenty za istnieniem Boga*, transl. M. Kuniński, Kraków 1994, p. 183.

²⁶ P. Sikora, *Wielość religii a debata realizm/antyrealizm religijny*, *Diametros* 29 (2011), p. 94.

recognized by cognitive forms and categories. On this basis, he makes the distinction between transcendent reality as the postulated basis of particular forms of religious experience and the phenomenal manifestations of this reality – different objects of the human experience described conceptually in terms carrying religious meaning accordance with a certain tradition²⁷.

Religious Experience as a Cognitive Act

The Polish neo-Tomist Piotr Moskal begins his analysis of religious experience from a fundamental question – whether God, existing as a being outside of the knowing subject – is the direct object of a cognitive act? In trying to solve this problem, he refers to the metaphysical-anthropological reflection of Thomas Aquinas. In his view, because of the psycho-physical unity of a human being, a suitable subject of knowledge must have a material character. God, due to His spiritual character, however, does not satisfy this condition and cannot be known by the senses. What is more, even after death a man cannot know God directly. A transformation of the human mind is required, the divine essence is not suitable for human cognitive abilities because of the absolute transcendence. This transformation of the human intellect is done through so-called “*lumen gloriae*” (“light of glory”), through which God is seen. In addition, a person needs something else, so that the essence of God is knowable to him. Due to the above-mentioned transcendence of the divine being, unable to be approached with ideas and concepts, man needs the very essence of God. It updates the human intellect and enables humans to see it through it. God becomes a kind of cognitive form for the human intellect. We cannot forget about the necessary condition for the possibility of all this processes, which is the separation of man from all natural cognitive forms (impressions, ideas, concepts) present in his mind because of the connection of intellectual and sensual cognition. The separation is done only in two cases: either by death or so-called “ecstasy” (separation of intellect and senses)²⁸.

So if a man is not capable of using his natural powers in the direct experience of God as a personal being, in this connection, the question arises – what is the proper object of knowledge in a religious experience?

In order to answer this question, Moskal analyzes the mystical testimonies derived from the Christian tradition (Teresa of Avila, Faustina Kowalska, Marcelina Darowska). On this basis, he comes to the conclusion that the object of direct experience is not the existence or the presence of God. Even the expression

²⁷ J. Hick, *Argumenty za istnieniem Boga*, p. 181–196.

²⁸ P. Moskal, *Doświadczenie religijne*, w: *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, t. 2, Lublin 2001, p. 679.

“face-to-face” relating to the direct relationship between God and man in these documents must be regarded as merely a metaphorical phrase²⁹.

In the realm of the divine-human relations there may, therefore, be no question of any type of immediacy (which also excludes the inference) or any opaque signs. God is an object of religious experience solely as the survival of the cognitive content and it is only in this sense that can we talk about the experience of divine being. In view of the fact that this content can be interpreted differently, God is also understood in different ways, depending on the particular culture. In his typology of specific items of religious experiences, Moskal emphasizes that religious experience may include the following items: subjective states of consciousness (belief or certainty of the existence and presence of the divine); states and organic-affective experience as a manifestation of God; sensual, imaginative or intellectual forms of cognition as a way of revelation; opaque signs (books, liturgical signs and symbols) as markers of God’s presence; anthropological and cosmological facts understood as the work of God and certain religious activities related to God. Moskal strongly emphasizes that in none of these cases, however, do we have to deal with the experience of God as the direct object of this experience³⁰.

Conclusion

These analysis were designed to show that the direct object of human religious experience is never a personal God. Many believers very often have this conviction. Such a conclusion is based on analysis of various forms of human spiritual experiences of representatives of various philosophical traditions. The present discussion is limited to the presentation of the results of only four important thinkers. W. James interprets the religious-mystical experience in terms of the feelings of happiness as a result of the sudden impact of the subconscious realm on the consciousness realm and the expression of the variety of contents stored in its depths. C. Taylor recognized spiritual experience as a particular way of human life in a religious community, whose existence and functioning is based on specific activities (rites) and cultural procedures according to specific rules revealed by God and transmitted by tradition. R. Otto and J. Hick bring the religious experience to the survival of a mysterious reality to which we have access through the emotions (Otto) or by supernatural interpretation of the world, expressed in religious terms (Hick). Finally, P. Moskal argued that the direct experience of God is impossible because of human cognitive conditions and radical transcendence of the divine essence. The act of religious experience is,

²⁹ P. Moskal, *Czy istnieje Bóg? Zarys filozofii Boga*, Pelplin 2002, p. 25–34.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 35–36.

for him, an acceptance of the different contents (states of consciousness and body, cognitive forms, physical signs, cosmological-anthropological facts and religious activities).

It is evident that none of these philosophers, through an analysis of written testimonies, came to establish a direct presence of God in an act of religious experience. The latter rather consists in having certain feelings and deeds, the appearance of cognitive contents and insights and the occurrence of facts and items that appear in a supernatural context. With this in mind, the problem of the existence of the Absolute as the object of these experiences remains. In the opposite case, it is possible to claim that these religious experiences are a form of projection of man and nothing more. In addition, there would be one more difficulty. Some thinkers stress the importance of direct interpersonal relationships between God and man as the foundation of religion and the spiritual growth of believers. In this situation, we would not really talk about an interpersonal relationship, because it would be tantamount to a "subject-object" relationship. Only a mediated relationship between the divine and the human being would be permissible.

Two important issues still evident in these analysis should be emphasized. First, all cases of religious experience are marked by individualism. It remains out of the reach of the community. An exception are the views of Taylor and Moskal, who emphasize the role of public worship in the formation and maintenance of a spiritual experience. In general, however, these states have a place within the human body and their intelligibility and communicability is limited. Therefore, they would not have any social function. The second important issue is the emotional dimension of these experiences. In most cases, these experiences are brought into the private sphere of violent emotions and feelings. These, in turn, have a lack of stability and they are often illusory. In this situation, the credibility of these experiences could come into question. It seems, therefore, that a very important issue would be the perception of cognitive elements.

Despite many uncertainties, there is no denying that the human spiritual search has been accompanied by various forms of religious experiences for centuries. Thanks to them, man can sometimes find a lost sense of his own existence, or build a certain type of religion upon them. Despite the fact that a man does not experience the divine essence directly, he is convinced that through them divine-human communication is possible in some ways. Religious experiences are a special space, labeled with an existential mystery which we can sense on the basis of our natural cognitive powers. Only a sense of faith can offer us more access to this mystery. However, contact with this mystery sometimes contributes to the transformation of man. It seems, therefore, that this "metanoia" is a kind of proof of the supernatural origin of these experiences and their significance for man.

CZŁOWIEK I DOŚWIADCZENIE RELIGIJNE (STRESZCZENIE)

Artykuł dotyczy problemu doświadczenia religijnego rozpatrywanego z punktu widzenia refleksji filozoficznej. Przeprowadzone w nim analizy mają na celu ukazanie, że bezpośrednim przedmiotem religijnego doświadczenia człowieka nie jest nigdy osobowy Bóg. Z takim bowiem przekonaniem możemy się spotkać bardzo często u osób wierzących. Do takiego wniosku upoważnia analiza różnych form duchowych przeżyć człowieka, której podjęli się przedstawiciele niektórych tradycji filozoficznych. W niniejszych rozważaniach ograniczono się do prezentacji wyników badań jedynie czterech ważnych myślicieli. W. James interpretuje doświadczenie religijno-mistyczne w kategoriach uczucia szczęścia, będącego wynikiem nagłego oddziaływania na ludzką świadomość sfery podświadomej i różnych treści zmagazynowanych w jej głębiach. Ch. Taylor ujmując doświadczenie duchowe jako określony sposób życia człowieka we wspólnocie religijnej, której istnienie i funkcjonowanie oparte jest na określonych czynnościach (rytach) kultycznych oraz postępowaniu według konkretnych reguł objawionych przez Boga i przekazanych przez tradycję. R. Otto i J. Hick sprowadzają doświadczenie religijne do przeżycia tajemniczej rzeczywistości noumenalnej, do której mamy dostęp za pośrednictwem uczuć wywoływanych przez nią w człowieku (Otto) lub dzięki nadprzyrodzonej interpretacji świata wyrażonej w siatce pojęć religijnych (Hick). W końcu P. Moskal, dla którego bezpośrednie doświadczenie Boga jest niemożliwe z racji ludzkich warunków poznawczych oraz radykalnej transcendencji istoty boskiej, sprowadza doświadczenie religijne do aktu przeżycia różnych treści przedmiotowych (stanów świadomości lub ciała, form poznawczych, znaków materialnych, faktów kosmologiczno-antropologicznych i czynności religijnych).

DER MENSCH UND SEINE RELIGIÖSE ERFAHRUNG (ZUSAMMENFASSUNG)

Der Artikel beleuchtet das Problem der religiösen Erfahrung, betrachtet vom Standpunkt der philosophischen Reflexion aus. Die Untersuchungen zeigen, dass das direkte Objekt der menschlichen religiösen Erfahrung niemals ein persönlicher Gott ist. Dieser Überzeugung begegnet man bei den Gläubigen sehr oft. Eine solche Folgerung gestattet die Analyse der verschiedenen Formen der menschlichen spirituellen Erfahrungen, welche für Vertreter einiger philosophischer Traditionen charakteristisch ist. In der gegenwärtigen Diskussion wird diese Problematik lediglich auf vier bedeutende Denker eingeschränkt. W. James interpretiert religiös-mystische Erfahrung im Zusammenhang des Glücksgefühls als Folge einer plötzlichen Einwirkung des Unterbewusstseins auf das Bewusstsein und einer Vielzahl von Inhalten, die in der menschlichen Tiefe gespeichert sind. Ch. Taylor behandelt die spirituelle Erfahrung als eine spezifische Weise des menschlichen Lebens in der religiösen Gemeinschaft, deren Existenz und Funktionsweise auf den speziellen Aktivitäten (Riten) und kultischen Verfahren ruht, die von Gott geoffenbart und durch die Tradition übermittlelt wurden. R. Otto und J. Hick begrenzen die religiöse Erfahrung auf das Erleben einer noumenalen, geheimnisvollen Wirklichkeit, auf die der Mensch durch die Emotionen (Otto) oder durch die übernatürliche Deutung der Welt in den weltlichen Begriffen (Hick) einen Zugriff erhält. Schließlich bestreitet P. Moskal die direkte Erfahrung Gottes, weil dies die menschlich kognitiven Voraussetzungen und die radikale Transzendenz des göttlichen Wesens unmöglich machen. Er begrenzt die religiöse Erfahrung auf unterschiedliche Inhalte (Zustände des Bewusstseins und des Körpers, kognitive Formen, physische Zeichen, kosmologisch-anthropologische Zustände und religiöse Aktivitäten).