

## Candidate 2 evidence

### Religious Experience Essay

How valid are psychological accounts of religious experience?

In this essay I will be evaluating how valid the psychological accounts for religious experiences are. I will be examining psychologists such as Freud and Jung as alternative accounts for religious experiences whereas I will be counter arguing with philosophers such as James.

Freud believed that religious experiences were fake and nothing more than an illusion created by struggling people who needed something to help distract them from their pitiful lives. Freud stated that people who undergone religious experiences were sick and living in despair thus turned to religion to help disguise the fact their lives were miserable. This means that people who had these experiences were actually lying to themselves to help cope with the fact that their lives were such a mess they created a yearning for something to help grant them happiness. Freud created what he called the Oedipus complex to show what he believed was the main cause of religious experiences. He stated in his complex that when young boys are going through puberty they begin to become aware of their parent's relationship and thus creates this jealousy the boys have for their father as they feel as if the father is taking away their mothers affection and attention. This means that when boys are becoming aware of their sexuality they begin to have a hatred of their fathers for taking their mothers away from them and become jealous of them. However, due to the boy's attraction towards their mother they become guilty of the fact they hate their fathers and urges to kill them that they push any feelings like that along with their sexual attraction to their mothers down and suppress any natural urges they have concerning that. This means that they are aware that those feelings are wrong so they push all of those feelings down and seek something to help contain those urges such as religious experiences.

Freud claims that men go through religious experiences as a way of helping them cope with the guilt of their past attraction and jealousy towards their parents. I believe that this theory is invalid because there is no way of telling that every man that has ever undergone a religious experience has ever felt any attraction towards their mothers or jealous and hatred towards their fathers it is impossible. I also believe that psychological account is invalid as it does not explain why women undergo religious experiences because the complex only applies to why men go through religious experiences therefore it cannot work.

Freud also believed that the reason why people go through religious experiences is because they did not have a father figure they wished for growing up leading them to yearn for fatherly love like God provides. He stated that the Oedipus complex theory works along side this theory as he believed that all the guilt from hating and being jealous towards their fathers caused a rift in their relationship thus leading to wanting a relationship with a father figure. This means that anyone who has undergone a religious experience may have been craving a relationship with God due to him being like a father figure to all so they can achieve the relationship they have always wanted with a father and heal the damage of their childhood relationship with their original father by replacing them. However, Freud faced a challenge in his theory when people started to question on how his theories would apply to St Teresa of Avail, as she was a woman so the Oedipus complex did not apply and she only had religious experiences with Jesus Christ not God so she was not seeking any father figure relationship. This means that St Teresa's experiences caused concern for Freud as his theories only apply to men and God whereas she is only every had religious experiences with Jesus. Freud stated that this was because she was a virgin and those religious experiences were only an illusion caused by her sexual frustrations as she had never had sex therefore she is replacing her natural sexual urges with God and Jesus. I believe that this is an invalid psychologist account because there are plenty of people who love their father and don't have any distasteful feelings towards their mothers and do have religious experiences because not everyone is the same so to conclude that everyone is feeling this way would be a lie. I also don't believe that this psychological account is valid because when Freuds theories did not work on St Teresa he boiled it down to that she was sexually frustrated which he had no evidence in which she was as many people do not wish to have sex or even feel the urge at all therefore to just say everyone is sexually frustrated is not true therefore his argument because more opinionated than factual.

Jung was a pupil of Freuds who left him as they disagreed over the importance of sexuality in religious experiences. Jung saw religious experiences more of a positive thing unlike Freud as Jung himself went through a religious experience stated "I dont need to believe it because I know it". This means that Jung does not need to believe in religion to know that a feeling of overpoweredness exists because he went through it and he knows what it felt like. However, Jung had a normal upbringing with no strange attraction or jealousy towards his parents and thus attempted to disprove Freuds argument. This means that even though Jung went through a

religious experience as someone who did not yearn for God and had normal feelings towards his parents he went against everything Freud claimed to be the causes. Jung despite going through a religious experience still did not feel like he had to believe in God and was labelled as agnostic. Jung believed in Otto's numinous conscious as he described the main feeling of going through a religious experience is the sense of something greater and something overpowering like Otto described. I believe that Jung's psychological account is valid because he disproves Freud's arguments with his first hand experience with religious experiences despite not believing in a God it was very real and could have a wide range of causes not just Freud's.

James, psychologist, had a differing view on religious experiences as he believed they did exist and were not an illusion like other psychologists. James believed that religious experiences consisted of four different factors, these factors being ineffability, transiency, passivity and noetic quality. Ineffability was going through the whole experience and then not being able to describe it because it was so different a surreal you were left lost for words, an example of this would be "am I utterly ashamed of my feeble attempt. Have I not said that the experience is indescribable?" said by St Teresa of Avila after one of her religious experiences. This means that people are usually left lost for words and cannot put their surreal experiences in everyday words as it was not an everyday occurrence. Transiency is the length of time taken to go through the religious experience, some people feel as if they have been experiencing the religious encounter for hours, days or even weeks but when they are back in reality it only lasted for a couple of minutes and the same vice versa. This means that because the religious experience is unlike anything you have ever went through time feels different when you are undergoing the experience in the moment. Passivity is when you are undergoing a religious experience by your body has gone passive and the superior being has taken over sometimes making you write certain things, speak in different languages, draw things and chant phrases. This means that during this experience you let the superior being take control and the outcome of the religious experience may give you physical insight or anyone external to you, insight or knowledge. Lastly, noetic quality is when you go through this religious experience and come out knowing so much insights and unobtainable truths that you would never be able to obtain otherwise. This means that once you have been through a religious experience you can gain knowledge or insights to things you would never be able to know without the religious experience. I agree with James as a religious account as it provides qualities to the religious experiences that the psychological accounts don't therefore making them invalid as they

do not put themselves in the minds of the people who have went through these experiences. However, I also disagree with James religious account as I believe that psychological accounts provide more reasons to why the religious experiences happen whereas these are just factors of what can happen during an experience therefore psychological accounts are valid.

In conclusion, I believe that psychological accounts to religious experiences are invalid as they contain too many concerning controversial arguments that can be easily counterargued and many philosophers struggle to be able to see how these arguments can be applied as they are far-fetched and lack evidence. I examined Psychologists who provide alternative accounts to religious experiences such as Freud and Jung and I also examined psychologist James to counterargue in favour of religious experiences.