



James Henry Leuba and the Modern Psychology of Religion

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Abstract

This study first examines the views of James Henry Leuba, a pioneering scholar in the psychology of religion, through his significant works, and then argues that his perspectives can be employed to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the current debates in the field of psychology of religion in the contemporary context. James Henry Leuba (1868–1946) is an influential psychologist in the field of psychology of religion, distinguished by his scientific approach to comprehending religious experiences and beliefs. Leuba investigated the psychological and biological origins of religious experience and emphasized functionalist perspectives. He asserted that religious beliefs are responses to inherent human needs. With this assertion, he significantly differentiated from William James, who mostly examined the "value of religion" without delving deeply into its origins. In most of Leuba's works, including *A Psychological Study of Religion* (1912) and *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (1925), religious beliefs and practices are predominantly examined as adaptable responses to the occurrences of life. These religious beliefs and practices play a significant role in satisfying psychological, emotional, and social needs. Leuba argued that the core of religious experience includes emotion, cognition, and willpower, and he introduced the concept of the "god-idea," which is a consequence of individuals' psychological impulses. Leuba's investigation of conversions and mystical experiences emphasized that religious transformations are complex processes with various psychological factors. He proposed that conversion involves a transition toward moral and emotional cohesion, frequently resulting in deep sensations of tranquility and unity. He recognized mystical experiences as reflective occurrences rooted in psychological processes and challenging supernatural interpretations. Leuba's observations seem to lead to an understanding of further study on religious coping, with contemporary scholars such as Kenneth Pargament building upon Leuba's concepts to investigate religion's influence on resilience and well-being. Leuba's research is related to contemporary discussions regarding spirituality, deconversion, and religious extremism. His argument that religion fulfills emotional and social needs corresponds with contemporary trends in which spirituality is becoming personalized. Furthermore, his functionalist perspective provides an understanding of nonbelief since individuals, despite deconversion, seek alternative pursuits for meaning-making. Leuba's psychological examination of the emotional grounds of religious beliefs also offers a significant framework for comprehending religious radicalization. Contemporary studies on extremism highlight the psychological motivations of ideologies that provide belonging, identity, and purpose. Leuba's influence on the psychology of religion remains in the modern era, and his emphasis of a pragmatic and psychological perspective of religion as an adaptable construct still influences modern interpretations. His focus on the psychological benefits of religion, without theological truths, provides significant insights for analyzing religious behavior. This study aims to build a bridge between the pioneers in the psychology of religion and the arguments currently taking place in the field. The current study reflects the belief that the perspectives provided by pioneering figures in the psychology of religion remain significant and can broaden perspectives in contemporary discussions in the psychology of religion. This study will thoroughly examine Leuba's significant contributions to the psychology of religion, including the sources of religious experience, the concept of God, conversion, a psychological perspective on the origins and functions of religion, and religious mysticism, while also exploring their relevance to contemporary issues in modern psychology of religion.

Keywords

Psychology of Religion, James Henry Leuba, Religious Experience, Current Debates in the Field of Psychology of Religion, Coping, Conversion

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James Henry Leuba ve Günümüz Din Psikolojisi

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Öz

Bu çalışmada din psikolojisi alanında öncü bir isim olan James Henry Leuba'nın görüşleri öncelikle önemli eserleri üzerinden incelenmekte ve daha sonrasında, onun geliştirdiği bakış açılarının din psikolojisi alanındaki mevcut tartışmalara daha kapsamlı bir anlayış sunmak için nasıl kullanılabileceği tartışılmaktadır. James Henry Leuba (1868-1946), din psikolojisi alanında önemli bir psikolog olup, dini deneyim ve inançları anlamaya yönelik bilimsel yaklaşımıyla öne çıkmaktadır. Leuba, dini deneyimin psikolojik ve biyolojik kökenlerini araştırmış ve işlevselci perspektifleri vurgulamıştır. Dini inançların insanın doğasında var olan ihtiyaçlara verilen yanıtlar olduğunu ileri sürmüş ve bu iddiasıyla, dinin kökenlerine inmeden çoğunlukla “dinin değerini” inceleyen William James'ten önemli ölçüde farklılaşmıştır. Leuba'nın ‘Din Üzerine Psikolojik Bir Çalışma’ (A Psychological Study of Religion, 1912) ve ‘Dini Mistisizmin Psikolojisi’ (The Psychology of Religious Mysticism, 1925) gibi çalışmalarının çoğunda, dini inanç ve uygulamalar ağırlıklı olarak hayatın olaylarına uyarlanabilir tepkiler olarak incelenmektedir. Bu dini inanç ve uygulamalar psikolojik, duygusal ve sosyal ihtiyaçların karşılanmasında önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Leuba, dini deneyimin özünde duygu, biliş ve iradenin yer aldığını savunmuş ve bireylerin psikolojik dürtülerinin bir sonucu olarak oluşan “tanrı fikri” kavramını ortaya atmıştır. Leuba'nın din değiştirmeler ve mistik deneyimler üzerine yaptığı araştırmalar, dini dönüşümlerin çeşitli psikolojik faktörler içeren karmaşık süreçler olduğunu vurgulamıştır. Din değiştirmenin ahlaki ve duygusal bütünlüğe doğru bir geçişi içerdiğini ve sıklıkla derin huzur ve birlik hisleriyle sonuçlandığını öne sürmüştür. Mistik deneyimleri, kökleri psikolojik süreçlere dayanan ve doğüstü yorumlara meydan okuyan yansıtıcı olaylar olarak kabul etmiştir. Leuba'nın gözlemleri, Kenneth Pargament gibi çağdaş akademisyenlerin dinin dayanıklılık ve esenlik üzerindeki etkisini araştırmak için Leuba'nın kavramlarını temel almasıyla, dini başa çıkma konusunda daha fazla çalışma yapılması için bir anlayışa öncülük ediyor gibi görünmektedir. Leuba'nın araştırmaları genel olarak maneviyat, dinden dönme ve dini aşırılıkla ilgili güncel tartışmalarla ilişkilidir. Dinin duygusal ve sosyal ihtiyaçların karşılanmasına hizmet ettiği yönündeki argümanı, maneviyatın kişiselleştiği çağdaş eğilimlerle örtüşmektedir. Ayrıca, onun işlevselci perspektifi inançsızlığın anlaşılmasını sağlamaktadır, zira bireyler din değiştirmelerine rağmen anlam yaratmak için alternatif arayışlara girmektedir. Leuba'nın dini inançların duygusal temellerine ilişkin psikolojik incelemesi de dini radikalleşmeyi anlamak için önemli bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. Aşırıcılık üzerine yapılan çağdaş çalışmalar, aidiyet, kimlik ve amaç sağlayan ideolojilerin psikolojik motivasyonlarını vurgulamaktadır. Leuba'nın din psikolojisindeki etkisi modern çağda da devam etmekte ve onun uyarlanabilir bir yapı olarak dine pragmatik ve psikolojik bir bakış açısını vurgulaması modern yorumları hala etkilemektedir. Teolojik gerçekler olmaksızın dinin psikolojik faydalarına odaklanması, dini davranışların analizinde önemli içgörüler sağlamaktadır. Bu çalışma, din psikolojisi alanının öncüleri ile günümüzde bu alanda yer alan tartışmalar arasında bir köprü kurma girişimidir. Bu çalışma, din psikolojisi alanındaki öncü isimlerin sunduğu perspektiflerin hala önemini koruduğu ve din psikolojisi alanındaki çağdaş tartışmalarda bakış açılarını genişletme kabiliyetine sahip olduğu inancını yansıtmaktadır. Bu amaçla bu çalışmada Leuba'nın din psikolojisi alanında büyük önem arz eden spesifik çalışmaları; dini tecrübenin kaynağı ve tanrı fikri, ihtida, dinin kökeni ve fonksiyonları ile dini mistisizm konuları üzerinden ayrıntılı olarak ele alınacak ve günümüz din psikolojisinin mevcut konularıyla bağlantısı irdelenecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Din Psikolojisi, James Henry Leuba, Dini Tecrübe, Din Psikolojisi Alanındaki Güncel Tartışmalar, Başa Çıkma, Din Değişirme

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Introduction

“He was a reformer as well as a scientific observer, and he cared very much that psychology should, through its increasing knowledge, show man how to mitigate his moral and intellectual imperfections. Though Dr. Leuba's chief contribution was in the psychology of religion, the breadth of his interests and their nature make him one of the pioneers in psychology in generally. ... He never as long as he lived had any respect for Freud or thought the analyst had made notable contributions. Dr. Leuba's keenness of mind, his power of critical analysis, and his lack of concern for the amenities of polite speech made him a devastating critic. He tolerated no sloppiness of thought or expression. His interests were broad, his standards high. He had the warmth of human sympathy which his frosty criticisms sometimes belied, and he was absolutely fearless” (McBride, 1947).

Katharine Elizabeth McBride (1904-1976)

American psychologist James Henry Leuba (1868–1946) is considered a pioneering figure in the psychology of religion and is best known for his research on the psychological underpinnings of religious beliefs. He was born in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, where he spent his childhood and youth before moving to the United States. He became a student of Stanley Hall at Clark University after overcoming early challenges. He completed a PhD and conducted additional psychological research before being appointed to a position at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, where he worked as a professor of psychology for the rest of his career (Hay, 1999). According to Morgan (2011), J. H. Leuba's book *The Psychological Origin and Nature of Religion* (1915) gave William James' work (*Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902) a new level of scientific credibility within the psychological community. Morgan (2011) also asserts that although William James (1842-1910) is often considered the founder of contemporary psychology, Leuba established the sub-discipline of the psychology of religion. Leuba's core perspectives provide significant psychological and biological insights into the essence and purpose of religious experiences and beliefs. He was one of the earliest contributors to the development of the psychology of religion. The field of psychology of religion has experienced substantial growth and development since the time of Leuba, thanks to the contributions of numerous scholars. However, his perspectives and ideas continue to influence the field of psychology of religion and have significant potential to impact the debates within the area.

Leuba argues against the idea that theology can be separated from psychology and philosophy. He claims that theology is a form of direct knowledge naturally present in our minds and shows its truth. Therefore, it should be examined and analyzed just like any other part of our thoughts (Wallis, 1913). Leuba significantly contributed to the psychology of religion with numerous valuable studies and publications. His publications include: *A Study in the Psychology of Religious Phenomena* (1896), *The Contents of Religious Consciousness* (1901), *Introduction to a Psychological Study of Religion* (1901), *The Psychological Origin of Religion* (1909), *A Psychological Study of Religion: Its Origin, Function, and Future* (1912), *Psychological Origin and Nature of Religion* (1915), *The Belief in God and Immortality: A Psychological, Anthropological and Statistical Study* (1916), *The Meaning of Religion and the Place of Mysticism in Religious Life*

(1921), *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (1925). In his studies, he mostly emphasized the psychological and biological underpinnings of religious beliefs. Rather than seeking answers in theology or metaphysics, Leuba took a functionalist and psychological stance towards religion, arguing that it has psychological underpinnings.

This study examines the views of Leuba on religion, mostly from a psychological perspective, and argues how his perspectives could be employed in the current debates in the field of the psychology of religion. It will first discuss Leuba's thoughts and viewpoints on religious experiences, conversion, and religious mysticism, exemplifying his pioneering studies. Then, the current debates in the field of psychology of religion in the modern world will be analyzed. Finally, the study will argue how Leuba's perspectives provide insights for the current debates in the field.

1. Leuba's General Thoughts on the Essence of Religious Experience and "God-idea"

Leuba's engagement with religion began in his early youth. Leuba was prepared for his first Communion in Neuchâtel during his adolescence through the instruction of a "mitigated Calvinism" (Leuba, 1937). He was confused and disheartened by his inability to either comprehend the doctrines he was required to defend or, conversely, to forge an internal resolve to inform his teachers that he was no longer dedicated to them. He was informed that salvation was impossible without belief in these doctrines, and he was unable to ascertain whether his distress was the consequence of a personal deficiency or in the religion he was taught (Hay, 1999). Discussing religious convictions or experiences is often a challenging endeavor. It is more common to present respondents with a set of specific possibilities; yet, sophisticated individuals frequently struggle to concur with any of these options (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 2013). Leuba (1934, as cited in Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 2013) deemed it unfeasible to document the religious convictions of philosophers due to their inability to comprehend the inquiries or reach a consensus on any of the responses.

The fact that Leuba was a consistent student and faculty colleague of E. D. Starbuck (1866-1947), both at Clark under G. Stanley Hall and at Harvard under William James, was of significant importance. Throughout their careers, Starbuck and Leuba collaborated closely (Morgan, 2011). Following James' Gifford Lectures, James Leuba, a student of William James, advanced beyond James's examination of religious behavior by conducting research to define the boundaries of an emerging field of psychological inquiry. Leuba employed all the analytical instruments of scientific inquiry to investigate the meaning and nature of human behavioral responses to what are regarded as "religious" experiences, in contrast to James's work that defended the "value of religion" without questioning its foundations (Morgan, 2011). William James (2015) characterized religious experience as an immediate and intimate encounter with the divine or the transcendent, which he posited is fundamental to all religious existence. Leuba (1904) contends that William James confines his endeavor to the eradication of the local and incidental, as well as the outdated accretions in dogma and worship, through comparative and historical criticism and engagement with the findings of natural science, along with doctrines now recognized as scientifically untenable or incongruous. Leuba (1904) argues that the core of the

matter is that Professor James' belief is not the result of an empirical examination of religious experience but rather a conviction founded on considerations that have yet to be adequately articulated and substantiated by certain "reasons of the heart" that reason does not comprehend, to which Pascal resorted in his endeavor to defend the Christian faith.

According to Leuba (1915), the essence of religious experience and behavior encompasses the entire human personality, incorporating both cognitive and emotional components of personhood. Leuba (1915) posits that religion engages the tripartite dynamic of will, emotion, and cognition rather than relying solely on any one of these attributes, regardless of the sophistication of its mythological and symbolic representations in society. Religion is fundamentally not just an endeavour of the uneducated mind to elucidate the nature of existence and its origins; these aspects are valid components of religious understanding. Leuba extends his expansive perspective on religion to the notion of God. According to Leuba (1915), the "god-idea" is not the sole source of religion; rather, it is an integration of desire, emotions, thought, and action. One of Leuba's (1986) most controversial statements was that it is not necessary to believe in God in order to experience the psychological benefits of religion. Leuba (1912) also discusses the issue of the future of religion in another work, *A Psychological Study of Religion: Its Origin, Function, and Future*. He suggests that as humanity continues to advance in rational thought and science, traditional religious beliefs may become less common. On the other hand, he does not think that religion will completely disappear.

Leuba (1925) also acknowledged the sex-repression theory of religion's origin, which posits that religious activities serve as sublimations of sexual desires. Leuba highlighted the prevalence of sexual symbolism in religion and the erotic characteristics of religious enthusiasm. Some of the classical saints and mystics provide the clearest example of the sexual context of religious activities, as Leuba demonstrated. Leuba (1925) has illustrated that numerous writings are replete with barely concealed sexual symbolism. Given that these individuals did not experience any overt sexual satisfaction, it is highly probable that their religious activities are partially the result of internal inhibition or frustration with this instinct (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 2013).

2. Leuba's Psychological Approach to Religious Experiences Through the Phenomena of Conversion

In addition to William James and G. Stanley Hall, the prominent psychologists who studied conversion were Edwin Starbuck and James Henry Leuba. Each held a distinct personal position concerning the credibility of religious belief. Their different perspectives on the psychology of conversion revolved around the importance of sexuality (Hay, 1999). In his very early study, *A Study in the Psychology of Religious Phenomena* (1896), Leuba investigates religious experiences, with specific emphasis on conversion and the psychological mechanisms that underpin these phenomena. Leuba's research constitutes one of the initial attempts to empirically analyze religious experience through psychological methodologies. The research emphasizes the transition from a static philosophical framework to one that is more practical, concentrating on psychological, emotional, and motivational aspects of religious nature. Leuba (1896) observes that psychology research did not completely integrate the expressions of religious life, while it remains a crucial area of interest. *A Study in the Psychology of Religious*

Phenomena (1896) addresses the deficiency of study in psychology at that time regarding the subjective experiences of religious life. According to him, comparative analyses of religions, historical examinations of their evolution, and inquiries into the essence of religious awareness significantly enhance our understanding.

In his study, *A Study in the Psychology of Religious Phenomena* (1896), conversion is the primary subject of Leuba's psychological investigation due to its significance in religious life and its distinct, well-defined characteristics. Leuba had some personal experience and interest in the topic of conversion. Leuba encountered the Salvation Army in Neuchâtel in Switzerland. A group of Salvationists traveled to the area for an evangelical mission, where they encountered significant religious hostility. Leuba was struck by their authenticity and bravery throughout persecution, ultimately experiencing a kind of conversion he characterized as more ethical than religious (Hay, 1999). Leuba (1896), characterizes conversion as a natural psychological phenomenon shaped by emotions, mental states, and social circumstances rather than as a direct consequence of divine intervention. Leuba regarded religious awakening as a possible preliminary stage to conversion. An individual may undergo a profound spiritual awakening that subsequently evolves into a comprehensive conversion experience. Leuba (1896) handles the psychological dimensions of regeneration or the concept of being "born again." He links conversion and regeneration to psychological processes of moral and emotional restructuring, which reconcile competing impulses and motivations. He contends that this transition is not an aberration but a natural aspect of human psychological growth, wherein individuals progress toward a superior condition of moral and spiritual union. He thinks that the examination of sudden, dramatic conversions can provide insight into the more general process of religious transformation, as these intense experiences disclose aspects of religious psychology that are more difficult to observe in more gradual spiritual changes.

Leuba (1937) describes his own conversion when he encountered the Salvation Army:

The moment came when I could no longer resist the appeal of the moral ideal they were for ever holding up before us: no compromise with evil, no half-way measure, no divided self; every impurity had to be disavowed, the divine Will alone was to rule. In the conversion through which I passed, the doctrinal background, presented so vividly and tirelessly by my friends of the Army, played a remarkably small role. It is the moral ideal itself which moved me. I saw it as an Absolute which it was my duty and privilege to realise. There was, in addition, an acute sense of guilt for having fallen short of a perfection regarded as attainable. This ethico-religious experience was perhaps the most beneficial one of my life; it was certainly the most violent one (Leuba, 1937: 178).

Leuba's own experience of conversion appears to be primarily grounded in the moral and ethical dimensions of religion; therefore, his perspective on conversion is constructed upon these characteristics. Leuba (1986) deeply examines the psychological roots of religious motivation in the conversion process, particularly focusing on the sense of sin, self-surrender, faith, justification, joy, the appearance of newness, and the role of the will. "The sense of sin is the first manifestation of the religious experience ending in conversion. The phrase 'to be under

conviction of sin' means more than mere knowledge of one's imperfections" (Leuba, 1896, 322). Leuba (1896, 327-337) considers self-surrender a pivotal moment in the conversion process. Instead of persisting in dependence on self-willpower, the individual attains a state of total submission to the divine will. The act of surrender, in which the individual relinquishes self-assertion and embraces divine guidance, frequently results in a profound sense of peace, joy, and unity with God. Leuba exemplifies this principle through multiple case studies, featuring notable religious individuals such as St. Augustine and Charles Finney. The full completion of self-surrender marks a pivotal moment that leads to a complete transformation of the emotional state. Joy, forgiveness, confidence, and faith replace despair, guilt, and loneliness (Leuba, 1896, 327). Typically, the subject interprets the sudden revulsion of the affective state during conversion as the removal of the burden of sin, confirming his justification and salvation. "The sense of condemnation should immediately dissipate, giving way to a consciousness of pardon and a sense of release if the pre-conversion struggle is the result of the conflict between desires that are identified with the individual will to live and those that are perceived as not belonging to the ego (the promptings of the Holy Spirit)" (Leuba, 1896, 349). The suffering of the individual under "conviction" is generally depicted in the most negative light, while the joy associated with the emergence of the faith-state seems to be indescribable (Leuba, 1896, 351). "A curious phenomenon is frequently met with at this stage of the conversion crisis. An appearance of newness beautifies every object; it is as if the state of internal harmony was projected outwardly" (Leuba, 1896, 353). Finally, Leuba (1896, 355) underscores the interaction between will and faith in the conversion experience. Initially, personal will plays a role in religious awakening, but it ultimately yields to faith and trust in a greater power. This transformation signifies the culmination of the conversion process, wherein the individual no longer struggles with internal tensions but experiences a profound sense of tranquility and harmony with divine will (Leuba, 1896, 355).

Leuba was mostly intrigued by the similarities between sudden conversion from drunkenness and religious conversion, which occurred without the benefit of religious belief or experience. Nevertheless, the brief nature of his treatment resulted in his avoiding the possibility of discrepancies in the detailed phenomenology of the cases he proposed as comparable. Additionally, he refrained from engaging in the same type of physiological conjecture when seeking to differentiate between mass persuasion and conversion (Hay, 1999).

3. The Psychology of Religious Mysticism

Leuba's research also encompasses mystical experiences. In his research, he investigates the potential of psychological processes to elucidate mystical experiences, including ecstatic visions or feelings of union with the divine. Leuba contends that transcendental experiences are not exclusive to religion but rather are a component of the broader emotional and psychological capabilities of humans. His work, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (1925), offers a comprehensive examination of mysticism through a psychological lens, emphasizing the emotional, physiological, and motivational underpinnings of mystical experiences across various cultures. According to Hay (1999), *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* is Leuba's most significant and compelling work, and Leuba himself presumably regarded it as his most significant academic contribution. Leuba was particularly fascinated by the prominent European

Catholic mystics, since he believed they displayed the characteristics evident in the Protestant conversion experience, including his own, to an excessive degree. Leuba primarily focuses on the Christian mystics Henry Suso, Catherine of Genoa, Madame Guyon, Teresa of Avila, and Margaret Mary Alacoque, dedicating the most attention to the Quietist Madame Guyon. 'What do these mystics really want when they say they want God?' he enquires. The responses are; self-affirmation, the necessity of dedicating oneself to another, the desire for affection, the pursuit of peace and harmony, and predominantly, organic sexual needs. The mystics, influenced by an early instillation of chastity, tended to overlook or reject their sexuality. Furthermore, biographical information indicates that in many instances—such as those of Catherine of Genoa and Mme Guyon—despite the mystics being married, the sexual aspect of the marriage was unsatisfying (Hay, 1999).

The first thing that Leuba (1925) carries out in the book is to differentiate mysticism from other types of religious experience. He defines mysticism as an intuitive and direct experience of unity with a larger-than-self entity, such as God or the Absolute. He distinguishes two major types of religious life: the objective religious type, which is characterized by a strong, experiencing connection or unity with the divine, and the mystical type, which expresses a relationship with the divine through practices, rituals, and connections that are 'business-like' in nature. This differentiation lays the groundwork for the book's investigation of mysticism as a phenomenon that frequently goes beyond the confines of rational thought and offers distinctive psychological advantages.

Leuba (1925) describes two primary approaches used by mystics to achieve altered experiences: passivity, which involves surrendering one's will to divine influence, and asceticism, which involves self-denial and physical discipline. These techniques allow for a gradual development of the mystical experience, moving from basic prayer to profound states that are similar to trance; they encourage this progression. Mystics seek a progressive oneness with God via greater surrender and self-abnegation, and this "ladder of mystical ascent," particularly as defined by individuals such as Saint Teresa, emphasizes how they aim to achieve this gradual unification within themselves. Leuba (1925) contends that mystical states, encompassing trances and ecstatic experiences, can be comprehended through dynamic psychological mechanisms such as introversion and an intensified concentration on interior happenings. He correlates mystical trances with various altered states of consciousness observed in psychological and medical contexts, such as hypnosis and epileptic seizures, to propose that these experiences have natural, explicable origins. He redefines the concept of 'divine illumination' as a subjective sensation of insight, not an objective disclosure. In conclusion, Leuba scrutinizes the implications that mysticism holds for both the scientific and religious communities. He argues that psychological principles can completely explain mystical experiences, negating the need for supernatural explanations. According to Leuba (1925), science and psychology have the potential to provide alternative frameworks for understanding mystical experiences, which do not require the invocation of divine authority. His viewpoint, which anticipates later arguments on the naturalistic understanding of religious experiences, encourages a shift away from supernatural explanations towards a more grounded, human-centered understanding.

The development of the mystical technique for the realisation of a quasi-physical presence of the Perfect One constitutes the most remarkable achievement of religion in man's struggle to overcome adverse external circumstances, his own imperfections, and those of his fellow men. It is one of the outstanding expressions of the creative power working in humanity. It is paralleled in the realm of reason by the development of science. Both lead, if in different ways, to the physical and spiritual realisation of man (Leuba, 1925: 299).

4. The Most Current Popular Debates in the Field of Psychology of Religion

Along with the classic debate of the psychology of religious experience that remains vibrant in the field; religious belief and well-being, spirituality versus religion, religious deconversion and nonbelief (including atheism, deism, and agnosticism), religion and identity in a multicultural context, the psychological impacts of fundamentalism and extremism and the role of religion, religious coping in the face of global crises such as COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis, digital religion and psychological implications, intergenerational religious transmission could be counted among the most current popular debates in the psychology of religion in the modern world. Additionally, there is a growing interest in neuroscientific approaches to religion. Historically, neuroscientists have been reluctant to investigate religion and spirituality due to apprehensions of scientific impartiality. Recent discourse advocates the exploration of these domains to enhance our comprehension of the human mind and behavior, positing that scientific inquiries can and ought to include religious phenomena. Several studies, such as *Where God and Science Meet: How Brain and Evolutionary Studies Alter Our Understanding of Religion* (McNamara 2006), *Neuroscience and Religion: Surveying the Field* (Yaden et al., 2016), *The Neurophysiology of Religious Experience* (Maselko, 2013), and *The Neuroscientific Study of Spiritual Practices* (Newberg, 2014), have provided very rich perspectives to investigate religion from neuroscientific approaches.

Nonbelief in God or any supernatural creature is one of the most current topics in the social sciences and is discussed from a variety of perspectives, such as sociology, psychology, education, religious studies, etc. Many studies have explored the psychological motives of nonbelief, such as *Atheists, agnostics, and apostates* (Streib & Klein, 2013), *The Psychology of Nonbelievers* (Uzarevic & Coleman III, 2021), *Nonbelief: An Islamic Perspective* (Sevinç & Coleman III, 2018), *Are atheists unprejudiced? Forms of nonbelief and prejudice toward antiliberal and mainstream religious groups* (Uzarevic & Saraglou, 2021). These studies have explored many perspectives of the psychology of nonbelief, such as the relationship between health and belief-nonbelief, the relationship between nonbelief and worldview, the relationship between nonbelief and personality, etc. On the other hand, religious deconversion is another topic that has been studied in the psychology of religion. The research, such as *Religious Deconversion in Adolescence and Young Adulthood: A Literature Review* (Hardy & Taylor, 2024), *Leaving Religion: Deconversion* (Streib, 2021), *Religion and the Development of Character: Personality Changes Before and After Religious Conversion and Deconversion* (Stronge et al., 2021), *Psychological Change Before and After Religious Conversion and Deconversion* (Bleidorn et al., 2024) have investigated religious deconversion from a psychological perspective. For example, the results of Bleidorn and colleagues' (2024) research show that the psychological

changes experienced during the process of religious conversion and deconversion are usually minor and mostly show themselves as changes in the religious beliefs and practices of individuals.

In the field of the psychology of religion, the psychology of religious fanaticism or religious radicalism is a very important topic since, in recent years, the world has seen many cases of terrible deeds and violence originating in religious fanaticism or radicalism. Faith-based radicalism: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism between constructive activism and destructive fanaticism (Timmerman, 2007), On Religious Fanaticism: A Look at Transpersonal Identity Disorder (Firman & Gila, 2006), The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How significance quest impacts violent extremism (Kruglanski et al., 2014), A Multidimensional Analysis of Religious Extremism (Wibisono et al., 2019), Understanding and Responding to the Fanatical Mindset: Educational and Psychological Perspectives (Zeitchik, 2015), Fear, fanaticism, and fragile identities (Tietjen, 2023) could be shown among the studies that explore the psychology of religious fanaticism or religious radicalism.

As these examples illustrate above, the field of psychology of religion is characterized by its dynamic and vibrant nature, primarily due to the multidisciplinary studies that integrate religion and religious beliefs with a wide range of other disciplines. The area of psychology of religion possesses a remarkable capacity to incorporate current developments from all over the world into its nature, as well as to generate knowledge that is extremely current through fieldwork.

5. How James H. Leuba's Perspective Provides Insights for Current Debates in the Psychology of Religion

James H. Leuba's initial theoretical and empirical contributions to the psychology of religion are fundamental to the contemporary study of religious experiences, belief systems, and behavioral motivations. Leuba (1912) emphasized the psychological and biological foundations of religious belief from a functional standpoint, diverging from theological interpretations and situating religion within the broader context of human psychology and social necessity. His perspective that religious rituals fulfill psychological roles is relevant to the current psychological discourse regarding religion's impact on well-being, religious identity, spirituality, nonbelief, and radicalism (Morgan, 2011).

Leuba's (1912) great focus on the function of religion in offering psychological relief makes him one of the earliest pioneering researchers who scholarly investigated religious coping strategies. Leuba's claim that religion satisfies emotional and psychological needs continues to be pertinent, especially in debates about religion's impact on mental health. Contemporary research consistently indicates that religious belief and practice are associated with improved well-being outcomes, including reduced anxiety, sadness, and suicidal thoughts (Koenig, 2012; Pargament, 2001). Kenneth Pargament's research on religious coping strategies has built upon Leuba's concept of religion as a source of psychological resilience. Pargament asserts that religion offers cognitive frameworks and emotional support for those experiencing stress, serving as a system that facilitates adaptation to adversity (Pargament et al., 2013). Leuba's functionalist framework also provides a contemporary perspective on the distinction between

spirituality and organized religion. When Leuba (1912) addresses the issue of the future of religion, he posits that traditional religious beliefs, particularly those that involve a personal God, may experience a decline as humanity progresses scientifically and rationally. However, he does not anticipate the complete extinction of religion. In contrast, Leuba proposes that the emotional and psychological components of the religion—including a sense of community, moral guidance, and emotional comfort—will endure in novel forms, potentially transforming into more individualized or secular spiritual practices. As religious affiliation decreases in numerous Western contexts, spirituality has emerged as an alternative method of existential fulfillment, frequently disassociated from conventional dogma (Fuller, 2001). Leuba's emphasis on the emotional and psychological functions of religion helps clarify the reasons why individuals may pursue spiritual practices outside of organized institutions. These practices frequently satisfy comparable psychological requirements for social connection, emotional solace, and meaning (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Recent research indicates that spirituality, which is defined as a personal pursuit of transcendence, self-discovery, and meaning, can have a beneficial effect on well-being even in the absence of formal religious structures (Jordan et al., 2013). This is consistent with Leuba's assertion that religious experiences are predominantly psychological and do not necessitate adherence to specific doctrines or beliefs in a deity (Leuba, 1912). When seen as an individual's non-institutionalized way of making sense of the world, spirituality can be a source of strength, resilience, and coping mechanisms (Hill & Pargament 2008). This non-dogmatic approach reflects Leuba's understanding of religion as a construct that is adaptable and fulfills a variety of psychosocial functions, irrespective of institutional context. One can criticize Leuba's perspective for reducing religious experience to an adjustable structure that primarily serves psychological purposes while overlooking the theological structures of the religions.

Leuba's viewpoints on religion also include analyses of religious deconversion and nonbelief. The psychology of nonbelief has emerged as a significant area of research, examining the psychological and social variables that lead to religious disaffiliation (Streib & Klein, 2013). Leuba's claim that religious practices serve adaptive functions rather than theological ones is consistent with the fact that numerous former believers continue to pursue meaning and community through secular or spiritual channels. This suggests that these psychological needs continue to exist even without traditional religious beliefs (Uzarevic & Coleman, 2021). Recent research has revealed that deconversion and atheism are frequently driven by the same existential concerns as religious belief, including the pursuit of identity and purpose. Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006) conducted research indicating that individuals who abandon religion frequently encounter difficulties in redefining their worldview and self-perception.

Finally, Leuba's perspective on the emotional and psychological dynamics of religion also provides a valuable framework for comprehending religious fanaticism and radicalism. He emphasizes on the psychological attachment to religious beliefs, authority, and fear as significant for religious extremism. Research on religious radicalization suggests that radical people may have a strong desire for identity, community, and significance, which are psychological drivers that Leuba identified as fundamental to religious behavior (Kruglanski et al., 2014). In recent research on religious extremism, Leuba's functionalist approach is relevant

to the complex relationship between emotional experiences and ideological beliefs. For instance, Wibisono et al. (2019) demonstrate that broader psychosocial dynamics, such as cognitive rigidity, emotional responses to perceived threats, and group identity, rather than doctrinal beliefs may lead to more religious extremism. Similarly, Borum (2011) argues that psychological needs for meaning and belonging are important factors for radical ideology, highlighting the relevance of Leuba's emphasis on religion as a psychological concept in modern models of radicalization.

Conclusion

James H. Leuba is considered by many academics as a pioneering scholar in the field of the psychology of religion. His research areas and studies on the complex relationship between psychology and behavior in religious life provide a comprehensive grounding in the field. Leuba mostly focuses on the psychological and functional elements of religious experience rather than theological or metaphysical explanations. He strongly emphasizes the role of religion in meeting the fundamental psychological needs of people. These criteria cover emotional support when people face difficulties, as well as meaning and purpose. Investigating the influence of religious belief and spirituality on well-being is quite popular in modern times, and Leuba's perspectives seem to be relevant and significant for the topic. For instance, recent studies have demonstrated that participation in religious activities is frequently associated with increased resilience, decreased rates of depression, and decreased anxiety (Koenig, 2012; Pargament, 1997).

Leuba's point of view seems to be quite relevant for modern debates about the psychology of religion, including subjects like the effect of religion on well-being, religious identity, spirituality, nonbelief, and radicalism. The debates on spirituality and religion in modern culture include a movement toward individualized spiritual practices, and Leuba's thoughts on the topic seem to be very significant. This shift seems to be in line with Leuba's assertion that religious experiences do not always require specific beliefs or structured establishments. In the modern era, "spiritual but not religious" identities have emerged, which emphasizes a new demand for existential satisfaction and psychological comfort beyond traditional organizations (Fuller, 2001; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Leuba (1925) sees religion as a flexible and adaptable construct. Recent research has indicated that spirituality, without any official religion, can provide psychological resilience and support for people, which signifies the flexible and adaptable dimensions of beliefs (Jordan et al., 2013).

On the other hand, in the debates of religious nonbelief and deconversion, Leuba's functionalist perspective may shed light on the mental processes that lead people to change their faith. His belief that religion primarily fulfills adaptive social and emotional purposes aligns with research that demonstrates how many people, even after deconversion, seek significance, belonging, and identity (Streib & Klein, 2013; Uzarevic & Coleman, 2021). People's revising of their psychological needs by seeking secular or alternative belief systems addresses similar existential concerns (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006). Besides, Leuba's thoughts on the psychological motivations of religious belief may assist modern people in understanding religious extremism. His focus on emotional and psychological elements, such as fear, authority, and the need for identity, is especially significant in understanding the psychological

motivations of radical ideologies. According to recent studies, the quest for meaning, belonging, and assurance are the most important motivators for extremist people; which approved Leuba's initial insights (Kruglanski et al., 2014; Wibisono et al., 2019). In conclusion, James H. Leuba is a prominent scholar in the psychology of religion by providing a solid perspective for examining religious behavior. Leuba has provided insightful perspectives for understanding historical religious behavior and still offers a framework for addressing the changing dynamics of religious belief and practice in the modern era.

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