



Essays in Radical Empiricism

William James

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Essays in Radical Empiricism shows William James concerned with ultimate reality and moving toward a metaphysical system. The twelve essays originally appeared in journals between 1904 and 1906. James himself collected them to illustrate what he called “radical empiricism,” but this volume was not published until 1912, two years after his death. Included are such seminal essays as “Does Consciousness Exist?” and “A World of Pure Experience.” The distinguished scholar and biographer Ralph Barton Perry, who edited this volume, called the essays essential to an understanding of James’s writings.

Radical empiricism takes us into a “world of pure experience.” In the essays, as introducer Ellen Kappy Suckiel notes, “James inquires into the metaphysically basic reality underlying the common-sense objects of our world. It is here that he defends his view that ‘experience’ is the sole and ultimate reality.” The essays deal with the applications of this “pure” or “neutral” experience: the general problem of relations, the role of feeling in experience, the nature of truth. Horace M. Kallen observed: “The fundamental point of these essays is that the relations between things, holding them together or separating them, are at least as real as the things themselves . . . and that no hidden substrata are necessary to account for the clashes and coherences of the world.”

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