**Atheistic Religiosity**

A Pragmatic Analysis in the Vein of

William James, Erich Fromm and Leo Apostel

Wim Van Moer

This PhD-thesis is a research concerning ‘atheistic religiosity’ (or ‘religious atheism’). The fundamental question is: “How can we understand and interpret these – apparently – contradictory expressions?”

At first, I present a cross section of the contemporary religion debates, by means of the most important representatives: pluralism (e.g. John Hick), monotheism and atheism. More attention is being paid to the last (e.g. the ‘New Atheism’, Dawkins, Dennett, Harris). Their writings seem to mention religious feelings and experiences, without any reference to anything supernatural.

William James (1842-1910) has thoroughly studied these experiences in his *Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature*. His open minded and broad definitions of religion/ religious experience, completed with the studies offered by Erich Fromm (1900-1980) and Leo Apostel (1925-1995), in combination with contemporary comments and recent scientific investigations (neuroscience), allows a study and interpretation of these experiences without the necessity of a god or a supernatural entity/reality.

Combining all this information, the aim of this PhD-thesis is to construct a framework, in order to fully grasp these religious experiences. This will show that a religious experience is a human experience, an existential process with a specific phenomenology. ‘God’ or other so-called supernatural entities/realities are no intrinsic part of these experiences. On the contrary, they might be called ‘second hand’ overbeliefs; man-made products. This clearly shows that atheists can have religious experiences.
The theoretical framework is then put to the test by means of different case-studies (Richard Jefferies, Jean-Claude Bologne, Jean Marie Gustave Le Clézio and André Comte-Sponville) in order to prove this point.