

People have had / have claimed to have ‘religious experiences.’

1. **‘numinous’ experiences** (Rudolf Otto) = theistic [theism = God is personal and “wholly other” than self and world; one has experience of the presence of / encounter with God who is “other” and separate from self]
2. **‘mystical experiences’** = pantheistic / panentheistic [‘pantheism’ = Ultimate Religious Reality is non-personal and not wholly other / separate from self and world for self-world-God are ‘One’; ‘panentheism’ = Self and world are “in ‘God’” and ‘God’ is “in” self and world; one has experience of unity with ‘God’ but not a simple identity with ‘God’]

‘Principle of Credulity:’ If it appears that something is the case to a person, one is entitled to hold that such is the case unless there are special reasons to doubt the positive judgment / that it is the case.

But, are there special / good reasons to doubt the reality of religious experiences / experiences of ‘God’?

‘Negative Principle of Credulity:’ If it appears that something is not the case to a person, one is entitled to hold that it is not the case unless there are special reasons to doubt the negative judgment.

But, are there special / good reasons to affirm the reality of religious experiences / experiences of ‘God?’

Problematically: Religious experiences are *not universal* for many people do not claim to have religious experiences of ‘God’

Problematically: Religious experiences, even for those who have them, happen *occasionally* and are thus *“unreliable.”*

Problematically: Religious experiences / accounts of religious experiences of persons *differ / are incompatible* with one another.

Problematically: Religious experiences *may be completely accounted for psychologically* (‘psychological reductionism’ = they are a merely matter of unusual or abnormal psychology = “it’s all in your head!”)

Problematically: Religious experiences are *private (“subjective”)* vs. public (“objective”) and are thus *not publicly ‘checkable’ / verifiable*.

But are the problems stated above special to religion?

Are there good reasons to hold that religious experience is especially problematic?

Positively: The special problems of religious experiences may be accounted for by ***the difference of their source / object ('God')*** compared to common experiences

Positively, There is the possibility / actuality of personal experiences (of aliens - 'God' / love for one's father - see movie: Contact) ***that are 'real' / 'veridical,' but for which one does not and cannot possess objective evidence*** and convincing arguments / 'proof' of their reality.

Problematically, There is the possibility of ***illusory / delusory experiences*** that are not 'real' / 'veridical,' thus accounting for lack of objective evidence / 'proof' of their reality.

But, positively: experiences of God are often held to be 'perceptions' of God and there are ***no good, non question-begging objections to perception of God*** (William Alston)

Problematically: a 'religious experience / experience of God' ***involves interpretation*** that the experience is that of a transcendent religious reality / 'God' and ***may be no more than incorrect interpretation*** of a non-God experience (= 'non-realism')

But, positively: All experience and knowledge involve interpretation and there is ***no good reason to hold that interpretation is more of a problem for religious experience*** than for any other experience (= 'critical realism')

What is the possible significance / "use" of religious experience?

- 1) they may be used ***as evidence*** for ***the existence of God*** as their source
- 2) they may be used ***to affirm the rationality / 'justification'*** of ***belief*** in God
- 3) they may be used to ***explain the occasion / 'cause'*** of belief in God