

Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 21 | Issue 4

Article 11

10-1-2004

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Recommended Citation

Kwan, Kai-Man (2004) "Jerome Gellman, MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE OF GOD: A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 21 : Iss. 4 , Article 11.
DOI: 10.5840/faithphil200421443
Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol21/iss4/11>

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The book jacket proclaims that the collection presents "a diverse collection of arguments for the stunning conclusion that God does not exist," but what it presents would in no way stun readers who have kept up with theistic philosophy of religion during the period that these essays were written. Recent theism is less preoccupied with defending classical definitions and are more preoccupied with probability arguments, the evidential argument from evil, religious pluralism vs inclusivism or exclusivism, debates over whether beliefs in atheism can themselves be rationally justified, debates over the adequacy of materialist accounts of consciousness, whether religious experience can be taken as cognitive, whether it is rational to accept religious views as basic, and so on. Some of the authors whose contributions have been collected in this volume have also written arguments against the improbability of revised versions of theism. I would hope that the editors would follow up with a collection of articles addressed to these other issues.

Mystical Experience of God: A Philosophical Inquiry, by Jerome Gellman. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001. Pp. ix and 148. Price \$84.95 (hardback); \$24.95 (paperback).

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The Argument from Religious/Mystical Experience for the existence of God (hereafter ARE) has been reformulated rigorously by analytic philosophers like Richard Swinburne, Keith Yandell and William Alston in the past few decades. Since then it has attracted a lot of critical discussions among professional philosophers. Jerome Gellman, a professor in the Ben Gurion University of the Negev in Israel, has emerged as one of the ablest contemporary defenders of this argument. In his first book on religious experience, *Experience of God and the Rationality of Theistic Belief*, Gellman defends the strong rationality of trusting the validity of experiences of God, and responds to many objections. Gellman now thinks that the strong ARE, which concludes that we should be taking mystical experiences of God as evidence for their validity until shown otherwise, is vulnerable to criticism because it depends on a controversial thesis, strong-foundationalism. So Gellman reformulates the ARE in weak-foundationalist terms.

This book has six chapters. After introducing the issue in chapter one, Gellman spells out the outline of his revised ARE in chapter two. Strong foundationalism maintains that a sensory belief is *sufficiently* justified by the relevant sensory experience independent of any confirming beliefs or evidence. For Gellman, this position seems to be too strong. In contrast, weak foundationalism, while still maintaining that a belief is justified *somewhat* by the relevant sensory experience, the latter's evidential support on its own is not sufficient. It requires support by other experiences. For example, my present impression that I see a tree gives me ini-

tial evidential sufficiency together with the rich background of perceptions of trees, and of other objects, by myself and by others. My present belief gains support by the accumulation of past experiences (p. 23).

With weak foundationalism, a plausible ARE must come up with crosschecks confirming a present perception of God or with reason to think crosschecks, if performed, would be successful. This would provide reason to think that perceptions of God were evidentially acceptable at least until proven otherwise. So the case for mystical experience of God must be built on the entire history of perceptions of God rather than mystical experiences considered as isolated episodes. However, Gellman rightly points out that we should not tie our notion of confirming evidence or crosscheck to that associated with sensory perception, and to make physical-object claims our evidential standard. It is because "Our ordinary physical-object beliefs are way overjustified by confirming evidence. We have extremely luxurious constellations of confirming networks there. Hence it does not follow that were mystical claims justified to a lesser degree than that, or not by similar procedure, that they would be *unjustified*" (p. 27). Gellman has made an excellent point here, which is relevant to most objections to the ARE. Many critics point out the ways in which religious experiences differ from sensory experiences, and then argue, sometimes convincingly, that religious experiences are justified *to a lesser extent* than sensory experiences. However, they then hastily conclude that religious experiences are therefore unjustified. This is a *non sequitur*; it is like arguing that since a scientist is less brilliant than Einstein, he must be an incompetent scientist.

Gellman believes that we need to "judge the extent of confirming evidence for individual perceptions of God on its own terms, by what is appropriate to it" (p. 27). This is provided mainly by the numbers, diversity and vividness of mystical experience. Each mystical perception carries some positive evidential value, but on its own it is not sufficient. However, the accumulative weight of numerous such experiences over time and across cultures, together with the prevalence of "ordinary" people having experiences of a "higher power," should not be ignored. Moreover, various kinds of checking procedures can be applied to mystical experience. For example, the following factors count towards the veridicality of a mystical experience: its vividness, profundity and sweetness, achievement of self-nullification, positive influence of the subject on society, etc. On the other hand, we should dismiss mystical experiences which are pathological, staged, unduly influenced by social pressures, or conducive to an evil, egocentric life, etc. (pp. 28-32).

Of course, the *prima facie* evidential force of mystical experience might be overridden by defeaters. In the remaining four chapters, Gellman proceeds to rebut many commonly offered defeaters of the ARE. (The following is only a very sketchy summary.) In chapter three, Gellman responds to Richard Gale who argues that for an object to be qualified as a perceptual particular, we must be able to understand what it means for the object to exist when not perceived. Physical objects satisfy this condition because they have spatial-temporal locations. In contrast, God does not have dimensionality. So God could not possibly be a perceptual par-

ticular (p. 41). Moreover, the non-dimensionality of God makes the re-identification of God impossible because re-identification is possible only if the alleged perceptual particular exists in something at least analogous to space and time. For example, being in different spaces at the same time implies numerical distinctness even if there is perceptual identity. In reply, Gellman points out that while dimensionality would be sufficient to give meaning to the very notion of an object's existing unperceived, it is hardly necessary. The idea of God as having a continuous inner life suffices to give content to the concept of God's existence unperceived (p. 41). Furthermore, Gale's insistence that the reidentification of God needs to conform to our practice of reidentifying physical objects is unjustified. Gellman argues that reidentifying physical objects is a 'holistic' practice: "we make the determination of the space an object occupies relative to reidentification of surrounding objects, while at the same time reidentification of surrounding objects depends on a judgment as to what space is occupied" (p. 43). For example, I decide that the streetlight in front of my house is the same one that was there yesterday because it occupies the same place. However, I decide it is the same place because I think it is in front of my same house, on the same stretch of the same street, and so on. This in turn depends upon determining they occupy the same place *they* occupied yesterday, and so on (p. 44).

Since our practice of reidentifying physical objects is in the end circular, we should not exclude the possibility of there being a holistic practice specific to the reidentification of God, with its own criteria like the seeming constancy of God's character, and God's 'auto-identification.' "We are not obligated to link the very notion of having evidence for a perceptual particular to the specific holistic practice of reidentifying physical objects" (p. 44). To buttress this point, Gellman appeals to Strawson's purely auditory world, in which the distinction between numerical and qualitative identity in a world is based on the pitch of a master-sound.

In chapter four, after examining the nature of reductionist explanations of mystical experience, and criticizing the disappearance theory of God-perceptions, Gellman focuses on Matthew Bagger's criticisms. Bagger complains that the ARE presupposes an unacceptable kind of explanation, i.e., supernatural explanation. Bagger believes that epistemic values are culturally relative, and there are no timeless canons of explanatory goodness. Since we now live in a modern age, we have to judge the acceptability of supernatural explanation with reference to modern epistemic values. Since Bagger believes that the "quintessentially modern inquirer" can only accept naturalistic explanations, the ARE which presupposes supernatural explanations must be rejected. In reply, Gellman points out that for tens of millions of religious devotees in modern societies, supernatural explanation is alive and well, and Bagger has also ignored the movement of 'new spirituality' in Western countries. So the secularists who exclude supernatural explanation are only one subculture which exists alongside many others in modern societies. Furthermore, on Bagger's conventionalist position, it is difficult to justify an a priori rejection of supernatural explanation. "To reject alternatives

solely because they are not the dominant mode of explanation would be to wield conventionalism unjustly as a protective strategy of a most conservative kind" (p. 71). (Gellman also suggests that a defender of the Argument from Perception might offer a non-interventionist conception of genuine God-perceptions. However, I doubt that this move will fully pacify a thorough-going naturalist like Bagger.)

In chapter five, Gellman considers whether sociological and neuropsychological explanations of mystical experience can serve as defeaters of the ARE. For example, Evan Fales builds on the studies by the anthropologist I. M. Lewis on spirit possession, and suggests that mysticism serves as a means of access to political and social power. Fales thinks that this sociological understanding of mystical experience is superior to the theistic explanation. Gellman responds by producing counterexamples to Fales' theory. In the cases of mystics like Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), Abraham the son of Maimonides (1186-1237), Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760), and Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), their mystical experiences have little to do with their attainment of power. Moreover, there is the phenomenon of non-institutionalized mysticism: mystical possession is often independent of social institutions, or the mystic is not well-placed for access to power. Gellman further argues that even if Fales' theory were convincing, it would not be successful as a defeater. Suppose the mystics did manage to achieve improvements for their marginalized group by force of their mystical authority. Gellman asks, "Isn't it fitting for God to appear to people for the relief of oppression and injustice?"

Gellman also considers Eugene d'Aquili and Andrew Newberg's neurophysiological theory of mysticism. They explain mystical states as the effect of 'deafferentiation' - the cutting off of neural input into various structures of the nervous system. For example, to explain passive meditation, they propose that the intent to clear the mind of content sets off an intricate system of deafferentiation within the brain that results in ecstatic and blissful feelings via intense stimulation of structures both in the lateral hypothalamus and in the median forebrain area. A consequent neutralizing of the posterior superior parietal lobule, responsible for spatial coordination of incoming stimuli, creates a sense of 'pure space' experienced as absolute unity or wholeness. Together, the patterns set up in the brain create an overwhelming experience of 'absolute unitary being' (p. 95). In similar fashions, the theory proposes explanations of a continuum of mystical experiences, both theistic and non-theistic. While Gellman notes that d'Aquili and Newberg themselves caution against a reductionist reading of their theory, he points out that the d'Aquili-Newberg theory does carry reductionist pressure concerning experiences specifically of God.

To rebut the attempt to take this kind of neurophysiological theory of religious experience as a defeater of the ARE, Gellman raises several points. First, the theory fails to take seriously enough the perceptual character of mystical experiences of God. "Instead, it treats such experiences as composed entirely of a cluster of subjective feelings waiting to be interpreted by the subject as a perceptual episode" (p. 98). However,

mystical experience of God is not merely a matter of feelings. So "its neuropsychological tale cannot be the whole story. At best, it accounts for the physiological basis for the affective concomitants of mystical experiences" (p. 98). Second, the neuropsychological theory is not incompatible with the idea that God is the external ultimate cause of those mystical experiences. In fact we should have expected that a non-sensory perception of God would involve unique brain events. So the neurophysiological theory by itself does not defeat a theistic explanation (p. 99). Here Gellman has interesting observations about what types of neuropsychological theory would overcome the evidential weight of the mystical experiences. During the process he raises deep questions that deserve further exploration.

In chapter six, Gellman addresses feminists who query the entire analytic approach to mysticism. They argue that by focusing upon private, individual experiences in mysticism, the philosopher ignores social and structural ills, e.g. oppression of women (pp. 103ff). They regard concepts like "experience," "evidence," and "rationality" as androcentric constructions which are used to mask the interests of upper middle-class white Western males (p. 109). In response, Gellman questions whether there is empirical evidence for the contention that treating mysticism as "private" reflects a desire to repress women by consigning them to a private sphere. Although the proponents of the ARE focuses on the epistemology of mystical experiences, it does not imply a denial of justice to women (p. 106). Gellman agrees that "philosophers should be open to the richness of content and texture of women's experiences and interpretations" (p. 110), but he thinks this can be construed realistically rather than relativistically. In the end, even feminists cannot get away from the fact that our experiences do have evidential relevance. We know, for example, from experience that white male bias infects the concept of "objectivity."

In the end Gellman only draws a modest conclusion. He admits that the ARE is not universally rationally compelling, in the sense of rationally obligating all who would ponder it to accept it. Despite Gellman's rebuttal of the alleged defeaters (e.g., the inadmissibility of supernatural explanation, gender objections), it seems to me Gellman still grants that the critics can *rationally* hold on to those "defeaters." However, Gellman emphasizes that those "defeaters" have not been shown to be rationally compelling for everyone either. So the ARE "is a line of reasoning that can be held (only) by some in a rational way that confers evidential sufficiency on the phenomenon of perceptions of God" (p. 52).

I think Gellman's attempt to defend a modest form of ARE is largely successful, and his replies to various objections are in general cogent. The significance of Gellman's work should be understood in light of his contribution to a new research project in philosophy of religion and epistemology. Swinburne, Alston and Gellman are not only reviving natural theology; they are also proposing a new epistemological approach which navigates between strong foundationalism and post-modern relativism. They admit our epistemic base is fallible but they advocate an attitude of *prima facie* trust to replace Cartesian doubt. While

"trust without infallible proof" used to be treated as irrational, now they suggest the spirit of rationality should be construed as "trust until shown otherwise by criticisms." They maintain the emphasis on experience but try to break loose of the straightjacket of traditional empiricism by broadening the evidential base of experience. The basic rationale is that in the end we need to adopt an *initial* attitude of *basic or fundamental trust* (i.e., a trust that can't be non-circularly justified) towards our perceptual experiences. In that case, it would be unfair to grant this kind of basic trust to sense experiences alone while adopting initial skepticism towards other kinds of perceptual experiences. This is nothing other than the construction of a radically new epistemology, which takes the Principle of Critical Trust (hereafter PCT) as a fundamental principle of justification/rationality (I prefer this name to "the Principle of Credulity"). Together with the efforts of Swinburne, Alston, Yandell, Caroline Davis, etc., Gellman, by effectively rebutting the common objections to this new approach in his two books, has helped to show that this new epistemology of religious experience is at least more viable, and more resistant to refutation than many critics think.

In fact, given Gellman's rebuttal of the objections, I wonder whether some of his concessions are necessary. For example, Gellman grants that those for whom supernatural explanation is not an explanatory option can *rationaly* reject the ARE. For me, this rejection is only rational in the very weak sense of "not capable of being conclusively disproved." This move seems to lack positive epistemic justification, and the underlying motivation is basically a dogmatic presupposition of naturalism. Similar things can be said about those who think God's non-dimensionality automatically disqualifies him from being a perceptual particular. This seems to betray a kind of epistemic chauvinism by taking sense experience to be the only standard. I am also puzzled by Gellman's final concession to the feminist objections. I think his reply has sufficiently shown that while God-perceptions may have been misused in their traditional context, it does not follow that their evidential force is then completely annulled. While I also think that the naturalistic explanation objection cannot successfully defeat the ARE (at least at this moment), I do think it ought to be taken more seriously. In fact Gellman's discussions do show a kind of ambivalence about this issue. This is also likely to be the major battleground where the proponents and the critics of the ARE will meet.

Gellman wants to mount the ARE on the basis of weak foundationalism rather than strong foundationalism. To clarify the issue, let me note that the Principle of Critical Trust (PCT) can be formulated in several ways:

- (generic PCT) Every perceptual experience of X provides some justification of belief in the existence of X.
- (strong PCT) Every perceptual experience of X provides *prima facie* justification of belief in the existence of X that is sufficient in the absence of defeaters.

- (weak PCT) Every perceptual experience of X provides some but less than sufficient justification of belief in the existence of X.

The strong PCT is incompatible with the weak PCT but both entail the generic PCT. Because Gellman seems to be swayed by the criticisms of Levinson and Malino, and Fales, he wants to withdraw his previous support of the strong PCT. Instead, he thinks that the ARE on the basis of the weak PCT is easier to defend. I agree that the weak PCT may look more reasonable and less controversial to more people. So if ARE can be defended in this form, it increases the argument's appeal and persuasive power. In this sense Gellman's attempt to work out a revised ARE is commendable. In fact Gellman is not the first one to suggest this revision of ARE. Gary Gutting and David Brown have similar proposals, and William Lycan holds to a form of weak PCT (though he does not apply it to religious experience). However, I am not entirely certain that the strong PCT is completely indefensible.

Basically, Levinson and Malino argue that a perception of any kind enjoys initial evidential sufficiency *only when* there are intersubjective tests for the veridicality of the perception, which have been performed and turned out positive, or which there is reason to believe would turn out positive if they were performed. Fales argues that crosscheckability *must be* integral parts of any perceptual epistemic practice before we can take it on trust. So the strong PCT is mistaken. Well, this issue is not new and long time ago C. B. Martin forcefully voiced this objection: "the presence of a piece of blue paper is not to be read off from my experience as a piece of blue paper. Other things are relevant: What would a photograph reveal? Can I touch it? What do others see?" However, the equally trenchant reply by Mavrodes has brought out the problems with this kind of objection:

"Suppose that I do try to photograph the paper. What then? Martin asks, "What would a photograph reveal?" To discover what the photograph reveals I would ordinarily look at it. But if the presence of blue paper is not to be "read off" from my experience then the presence of a photograph, and *a fortiori* what the photograph reveals, is not to be read off from my experience either. It begins to look as though I must take a photograph of the photograph, and so on ... The same sort of thing happens if I try to determine "what others see." I send for my friend to look at the paper... But his presence is not to be read off from my experience either. Perhaps I must have a third man to tell me whether the second has come and the infinite regress appears again. Interpreted in this way, Martin's thesis fails because it converts into a general requirement something that makes sense only as an occasional procedure. At most we can substitute one unchecked experience for another."

Inter-subjective tests and crosschecks are good things to have but the problem is that all these checks are ultimately circular in the sense that

their reliability has to be presupposed if they are to do any useful work. If the strong PCT cannot be applied to an isolated perception and hence the latter has to be kept in suspense, how can the other perceptions help if their epistemic status is equally insecure? Should we not also keep them in suspense? Furthermore, to bring the past record of testing to bear on an isolated experience, we have to trust our memory. The skeptical question will rise again here: why can we trust this memory before extensive testing? This memory should then be crosschecked with other memories or perceptions but then what about those? The circle goes on and on and I am not sure the ensuing project of epistemic justification will be promising.

Of course the above discussions have only scratched the surface of the epistemic Pandora's box. If the strong PCT is defensible, this will only strengthen the ARE. Anyway, the strong PCT is controversial and Gellman's constructive employment of the weaker PCT is welcome.

NOTES

1. Jerome Gellman, *Experience of God and the Rationality of Theistic Belief* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997)

2. Henry-Samuel Levinson and Jonathan Malino, "Who's afraid of a BEE STING?" *Iyyun, The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*, 48 (1999): 293-326; Evan Fales, "Do Mystics See God?" in Michael L. Peterson (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

Gary Gutting, *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1982); William Lycan, *Judgment and Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

C. B. Martin, *Religious Belief* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959), pp. 87-88.

5. George Mavrodes, *Belief in God: A Study in the Epistemology of Religion* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1970), pp. 75-76.