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ON THE COGNITIVITY OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES

Richard M. Gale

I begin by summarizing my previously published objections to the argument for the cognitivity of mystical experiences based on their being analogous to sense experiences. Then I respond to published objections to my position from Alston, Gellman, Wainwright, and Plantinga. Finally, I revise my original position so as to meet some new objections of my own.

Are mystical experiences cognitive, a basis on which knowledge is gained of an objective reality that transcends the world accessed through the ordinary five senses? No doubt they have an over-powering noetic phenomenological quality that leaves their subjects sweating with conviction that they are. But appearing noetic and actually being noetic do not always coincide, as witnessed by the equally overwhelming noetic quality possessed by various noncognitive experiences, such as dreams, and drug-induced experiences. Plainly, arguments are needed to support the cognitivity claim. Fortunately, there has been no shortage of arguments in recent years to show that mystical experiences, understood as direct nonsensory perceptions of the presence of God, are cognitive.¹ This paper will critically evaluate them.

I. Arguments Based on an Analogy with Sense Experience

Most of these recent arguments are based, explicitly or implicitly, on an analogy with sense experience, the generic version of which goes as follows.

1. Mystical experiences are analogous to sense experiences in cognitively relevant respects.
2. Sense experiences are cognitive. Therefore,
3. mystical experiences are cognitive.

Since sense experiences are taken by all but complete skeptics to be cognitive, if mystical experiences should prove to be sufficiently analogous to them, they should be accorded all the epistemic rights and privileges thereunto appertaining to sense experiences.



Analogical arguments vary with respect to how strong they take the analogy to be. The weakest is a version of language-game fideism based on the greatest story ever told – that the language-game is played. But that both types of experience are included within an ongoing normative rule governed linguistic practice is too thin an analogy to support the inference of 3 from 2. For there have been numerous language-games, such as witchcraft and astrology, that their participants took to be cognitive of an objective reality that plainly are not, given that their belief outputs clash with those of more deeply entrenched and well supported language-games. Furthermore, there are language-games in which belief outputs are based on subjective experiential inputs, such as those for making avowals of pain on the basis of introspective experience. In these subjective language-games the experiential verb takes a cognate accusative, “I pain (or feel painfully)” being the perspicuous rendering of “I feel a pain.”

A language-game can count as cognitive only if it supplies checks and tests for distinguishing between its veridical and unveridical experiential inputs. Thus, the analogy between sense and mystical experiences can be supportive of the inference of 3 from 2 only if there are tests for distinguishing between veridical and unveridical mystical experiences. But they cannot be just any tests, for this would allow cultist type language-games, in which the only test is based on what the cult leader says, to count as cognitive. The tests must be sufficiently analogous to those for sense experience.

Among the analogical arguments that require analogous tests there is a distinction between the retail and wholesale versions. The former, which was advanced initially by William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and more recently by Richard Swinburne, draws the analogy between individual sense and mystical experiences, whereas the latter, which has been championed by William Alston and William Wainwright, draws the analogy between the sense experience doxastic practice (SP) and the mystical experience doxastic practice (MP), in which a doxastic practice is a normative rule-governed social practice for forming existentially committed objective beliefs from a certain type of experiential input, subject to defeating overrides. This is the wholesale analogical argument.

4. The MP doxastic practice is analogous to the SP doxastic practice in cognitively relevant respects.
5. The SP doxastic practice is reliable in that most of its belief outputs are true. Therefore,
6. the MP doxastic practice also is reliable.

Both doxastic practices are based on an a priori, framework constituting rule that holds the occurrence of the experiential input in question to constitute both evidence and a prima facie warrant for the belief that reality is the way in which it is represented in this experience. The rule is a priori because any justification of it will have to assume that experiences of this type usually are reliable, thereby falling prey to vicious

epistemic circularity. The warrant for believing is only *prima facie*, because it is subject to defeat by overrides consisting in flunked tests. The wholesale version is superior to the retail one, since the needed tests must be part of a social practice, given that a rule requires the possibility of public enforcement, which is just what a doxastic practice supplies.

In Richard Swinburne's argument this rule takes the form of the "Principle of Credulity" (PC), according to which if it epistemically seems to a subject that x is present, then probably x is present, unless there are defeaters, in which an epistemic seeming serves as a basis for a subject to believe that the apparent object of the seeming exists and is as it seems to be (254). Since Swinburne gives full generality to PC, he does not have to present an analogical argument to justify extending it from sense to mystical experiences. His argument goes as follows.

7. It epistemically seems to the subjects of mystical experiences that God is present.
8. If it epistemically seems to a subject that x is present, then probably x is present, unless there are defeaters. Therefore,
9. God probably is present, unless there are defeaters.

Swinburne thinks that the only possible defeater for 9 is a powerful argument for the nonexistence of God, and it is the purpose of his global probabilistic argument for God's existence, based on an agglomeration of the premises of all the empirical theistic arguments, to defeat this potential defeater.

My interpretation of Swinburne's argument as an analogical one, in which PC is initially applied to sense experience and then extended to mystical experiences on the grounds of their being analogous to sense experience, is a well intentioned anachronistic interpretation of his text.² For the unrestricted version of PC is not acceptable. A person's nonperceptual epistemic seemings are notoriously subject to all kinds of irrationalities. The best that can be said for a nonperceptual epistemic seeming that a proposition p is true is that it increases p 's probability over its prior probability, but this watered down version of PC is too weak to enable Swinburne to infer 9 from 8. That it is pragmatically, as contrasted with epistemically, rational for subjects to trust their epistemic seemings is plausible, but this version of PC will not enable 9 to be derived from 8 but only

9'. It is pragmatically rational to believe that God probably is present, unless there are defeaters.

II. Objections to the Analogical Argument

It now will be argued that the analogy between sense and mystical experiences is far too thin to support the inference of 6 from 5 in the wholesale version of the analogical argument. My argument is two-pronged: It is argued, first, that the tests for the veridicality of mystical experiences are not sufficiently analogous to those for sense experience

and, second, that mystical experiences, on purely conceptual grounds, fail to qualify as perceptions and thus are radically disanalogous to sense experiences. In addition to rehashing some of my previously published criticisms,³ I will respond to objections that have been made to them and also will try to correct some blunders I made.

The major tests for the veridicality of sense experience include agreement among observers, successful predictions, and being caused-in-the-right-way by the apparent object of the experience. The agreement test requires the observers whose testimony counts as confirmatory or disconfirmatory of the veridicality of a person's sense experience to be normal and in the right sort of epistemic circumstances. With respect to the former, they must not be subject to any psychological disorder that would distort their perception and their sensory faculties must be functioning in a normal, healthy manner; and, with regard to the latter, they must be properly positioned in space and time and the causal chain linking the experience with its object be of the right sort.

The mystical analogue to this agreement test is woefully weak. In the first place, whereas there are objective, agreed upon tests for determining when a person's sensory faculty is not functioning properly, there are no such tests for determining when a person's mystical faculty is not functioning properly. Furthermore, there is no mystical analogue to a sensory observer being properly positioned in space, since God does not stand in any spatial relations. That there is no mystical analogue to normality of observer and circumstances results in a pernicious evidential asymmetry in that the occurrence of mystical experiences are taken to be confirmatory but the failure to have them, even when the mystical way of meditating, fasting and the like is followed, is not taken as disconfirmatory. Thus the mystical agreement test is one that can be passed but not flunked and thus no test at all. It is like a heads I win, tails you lose sort of con game.

There is no mystical analogue to the caused-in-the-right-way test, because there are no supernatural causal chains or processes linking God with worldly events. Another disanalogy is that whereas we can determine on the basis of sense experience alone that a given sense experience is caused in the right way by its apparent object, we cannot determine on the basis of mystical experience alone that a given mystical experience is caused in the right way. Furthermore, the defenders of the cognitivism of mystical experiences cannot agree among themselves whether there are any limitations on what is the right way for God to cause a mystical experience. At one extreme there are those like Wayne Proudfoot who require that a veridical mystical experience be directly caused by God sans any worldly proximate cause. And, at the other extreme, there are those like Walter Stace and Houston Smith who allow for a veridical mystical experience not only to admit of a worldly cause but any worldly cause, even ingestion of LSD.

It is only the prediction test that seems to have any application to mystical experiences. All of the great mystical traditions have taken the subject's favorable spiritual and moral development and the beneficial consequences for her society to count as confirmatory of the veridicality

of her mystical experience. They reason that if one is in direct experiential connection with God, no less realizing partial or complete unification with him, it should result in these favorable consequences. Thus, these good consequences are confirmatory of the experience's veridicality in virtue of categorical link between them and God's omni-perfections.

There are two difficulties with the mystical analogue to the prediction test. The less serious difficulty is that the predicted good consequences are just as likely to occur whether the mystical experience that is being tested is veridical or not, that is, the probability that that there will be these good consequences relative to background knowledge, k , and that the experience is veridical is about the same as it is relative to k alone, the reason being that k contains facts about the naturalistic causes and consequences of mystical experiences. No doubt, these good consequences are more likely to occur if the subject believes that her experience is veridical, but this gives only a pragmatic, not an epistemic, justification for her so believing. The more serious difficulty is posed by the existence of equally viable rival doxastic mystical practices within the great extant religions, with their different conceptions of what constitutes desirable moral and spiritual development, revealed truths that the experience must not contradict, and ecclesiastical authorities and past holy persons.

Another way that the prediction test is appealed to is that it is more probable that mystical experiences will occur if God exists than if he doesn't, that is, the probability that mystical experience will occur relative to the existence of God and background knowledge k is greater than the probability that mystical experiences will occur relative to k alone. But this is dubious, again, because k contains facts about the naturalistic causes of mystical experiences. This stands in stark contrast with sense experience, for which it unquestionably is the case that it is more probable that sense experiences will occur if there are physical objects than if there are not, assuming that k in this case contains neither that there are physical objects nor any evil demon type hypothesis. What this shows is that a prediction test is confirmatory of the veridicality of an experience of an O-type object only if the existence of an O-type object has both explanatory value and prior probability with respect to O-type experiences. Mystical experiences of a God-type object have been seen to have neither. The theist might argue at this point that it is more probable that there will exist creatures of sufficient complexity to be subject to these causes if God exists than if he doesn't. This greatly complicates the case for the cognitivism of mystical experiences, but it might be, as Alston, Wainwright, Gellman, and Swinburne contend, that we must consider the global or agglomerative case for theism in determining whether mystical experiences are cognitive. If it could be established that God exists this would greatly increase the probability that mystical experiences are reliable indicators of objective reality.

III. Responses to Objections

The defenders of the cognitivism thesis have ready responses to all of the preceding objections to the mystical analogues to the veridicality

tests for sense experience. Both Alston and Wainwright stress that disanalogies between how these tests apply to sense and mystical experience are not damaging to their analogical argument if these differences are a result of a conceptual difference between the respective apparent objects of these experiences – physical objects and God. Because it is a conceptual truth that God is a completely free supernatural being whose behavior and linkage with the world is not nomically-based, the analogical arguer should not be bothered by the fact that the agreement and caused-in-the-right-way tests work in radically different ways for the two types of experience. But to show the conceptual basis for a disanalogy between them does not explain away the disanalogy, just as explaining why one has a disease does not eliminate the disease. Furthermore, a conceptually-based disanalogy is the most damaging sort there can be.

Alston contends that the disanalogy between the way in which the agreement test applies to sense and mystical experiences would be damaging if it resulted from an ad hoc requirement that this test can serve only as confirmatory for mystical experiences, thus being a test that can only be passed, whereas it serves as both confirmatory and disconfirmatory for sense experience. Since the evidential asymmetry in the way in which the agreement test works for mystical experience results from the theistic creed, with its claim that God freely bestows grace on someone whom he permits to directly perceive him, no harm is done to the analogical premise. But, again, to explain why there is a disanalogy does not lessen the harm it does to the analogical premise.

I had argued that the challenge posed by religious diversity to the mystical prediction test is especially virulent: Because these rival mystical traditions have opposing consequentialist criteria of veridicality, they are more deeply divided than if they accepted the same criteria but differed with respect to how they applied to specific cases. In response, Alston wrote the following.⁴ "If there is no neutral procedure for settling the dispute, each party is in a better position to stick by its guns than they would be if there were such a procedure. This is because in the latter case the most reasonable course would be to suspend judgment until that procedure is deployed. In the other case, since there is nothing analogous to wait for, there isn't the same reason to deny the rationality of each contestant's holding firm." This shows only that when the disputants do not agree upon a decision procedure for settling their disagreement each is pragmatically justified in holding firm in their rival beliefs. But Alston is supposed to show that each is epistemically justified in doing so. And herein the fact that they cannot agree upon a method for settling their difference more seriously divides them than would a disagreement about the facts, thereby discrediting the epistemic credentials of each of their claims. A better way for Alston to meet the challenge of religious diversity is to pursue the ecumenical route by showing that there are important commonalities between the mystical traditions of the great extant religions and that their differences do not amount to any incompatibility between their different reality-claims.

Another defensive strategy pursued by the analogical arguer is the divide-and-conquer one in which each of the preceding alleged dis-

analogies is discussed separately and shown not to be alone decisive. This is clearly seen in Wainwright's criticisms of my attack on the analogical premise.⁵ With regard to the agreement test, he contends that "Gale *overstates* his case" when he claimed that there are no [mystical experience] analogues to the sense experience agreement test's requirement that the observer and circumstances be normal" (116; my italics). No doubt, I am guilty of overstating my case, both here and elsewhere, given that before I entered philosophy I worked as a song plugger for a music publishing firm and became adept at the great art of the "hype-job." But, nevertheless Wainwright does concede some force to my charge of disanalogy when he writes that the connection between the condition of the observer and her having an M-experience "is admittedly *looser* than it is in the case of sense perception." (116; my italics). Another example of his giving ground but denying that this alone is sufficient to wipe out the analogical argument is: "Admittedly, failures of agreement like these differ from those counting against the veridicality of an apparent sense perception. Even so, the 'evidential asymmetry' Gale alludes to *isn't great enough* to make 'the mystical use of the agreement test look like a heads I win, tails you lose sort of con game'" (120; my italics).

The same is said in response to my charge that there is no mystical analogue to the caused-in-the-right-way test for sense experience. "While these points are important, they aren't *sufficient* to *totally* undermine the caused-in-the-right-way test. For example, diversity [among different religions] is, as Gale says, 'a cognitively invidious disanalogy.' Whether it is *sufficient* to 'destroy' the relevant analogy is another matter" (122; my italics). The tests, in general, "aren't *as dissimilar* as Gale thinks. In response to another alleged disanalogy he counters that it "is [not] *as devastating* as [Gale] thinks" (124; my italics). And when Wainwright summarizes his discussion of the alleged disanalogies he concludes that "I don't think that the contents of the tests are *totally* dissimilar although the disanalogies as well as analogies are striking" (128; my italics).

The italicized parts of these quotations clearly bring out Wainwright's piecemeal, divide-and-conquer strategy for neutralizing the force of the disanalogies. Although he shows that each disanalogy is not alone sufficient to destroy the analogical argument, he fails to consider whether they are when agglomerated. Obviously, the issue of how close the analogy must be between the tests for the veridicality of sense and mystical experiences for the argument to work is a vague one; for, as my laid-back Canadian good old boy, Bob, who made a prominent appearance in my *On the Nature and Existence of God*, said, "Everything is just about like everything else." As I see the agglomerative case, Wainwright has unwittingly given away almost the entire family farm acre by acre, leaving him, at best, with only a tiny vegetable garden, to which Bob would counter that a vegetable garden is just about the same as a farm. I guess we'll always have Bob with us, damn him! But one thing is for sure: The agglomerative case is far stronger than one based on taking each disanalogy in isolation.

The same sort of divide-and-conquer strategy runs rampant in Alston's great, classic book, *Perceiving God*. He does grant that the unresolved problem of religious diversity "does have *significant* adverse consequences for the epistemic status of CMP [Christian mystical doxastic practice] and other forms of MP" (275; my italics). But this candid admission of *significant* epistemic discreditation is countered-balanced by the claim that "although this diversity reduces somewhat the maximal degree of epistemic justification derivable from CMP, it leaves the practitioner sufficient prima facie justified in M-beliefs [mystical beliefs] that it is rational for her to hold those beliefs, in the absence of specific overrides" (279). (Are these two claims logically compatible?!) Similar concessions of lessened epistemic creditability are made at many other places in his book in response to ways in which MP is SP's epistemic inferior. That MP's agreement test is a pale shadow of SP's agreement test "shows that [MP] is epistemically inferior to SP" but it does not go so far as to show "that [MP] is unreliable" (220). Other ways in which he concedes that MP is SP's epistemic inferior is that SP is far more well established than any version of MP (283), that everyone must participate in SP whereas only a small minority participate in MP and, moreover, have the option of not doing so. But, like Wainwright, he never considers whether he has given away the whole family farm acre by acre when all of his concessions are agglomerated. Again, we run up against Bob, and again it might well be that how one is impressed by the analogies and disanalogies depends on one's background belief concerning the overall case for theism.⁶

Jerome Gellman's defensive strategy in his *Mystical Experience of God* also treads on this ineliminable vagueness but with a twist that brings his position perilously close to a language-game fideism with any old tests.

There is no good reason to make physical-object claims our evidential standard....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 procedures, that they would be *unjustified*. All that follow would be that they enjoyed less justification than belief in physical-object statements, but perhaps be justified nevertheless (27)

Herein Gellman appears to be making epistemic warrant and justification internal to a doxastic practice, each being given carte blanche to determine the criteria for warranted or justified belief within its own practice. This relativization of warrant to a doxastic practice is language-game fideism.

IV. My "Killer Argument"

The second prong of my attack on the analogical argument is to show that mystical experiences, on purely conceptual grounds, cannot be perceptual. That they are taken to be perceptual by their subjects doesn't

settle the matter, since mystics can be mistaken in what they say about their experiences, as witnessed by their mistaken claim of ineffability. If they were ineffable, how come mystics keep writing about them and, moreover, do such a good job of describing their experiences, even for the straight community of nonmystics. Recall that we did not want to give mystics privileged authority as to whether their experience is noetic. That the apparent object of their experience is given independently of their will is consistent with their experiences not being perceptual: an experience of a pain has such a givenness but its apparent object is only a cognate accusative. What I hope to do is to unearth a conceptual truth about a perceptual experience that mystical experience fails to satisfy, thereby showing that

A. It is conceptually impossible to perceive God.

This would totally devastate the analogical premise. What follows is a reformulation of my argument in *On the Nature and Existence of God* (326-43) that I hope will escape the published objections that were made to it by Gellman, Plantinga, and Wainwright. Their objections are based on a misconstrual of the argument, but the fault is mine for not having more clearly formulated it, which fault I hope to rectify now.

The first step in my argument is to point out that it is a conceptual truth that

B. A type of experience can qualify as perceptual only if it is possible its object (i) can exist when not actually perceived, (ii) be the common object of different experiences, both by a single person at different times and by two persons at the same time, and (iii) be such that a distinction can be made between perceptions that are of numerically one and the same rather than qualitatively similar objects of that type.

It must be stressed that *B* gives only a necessary condition for an experience being perceptual. There is no doubt that the object of a sense perception satisfies requirements (i)-(iii). But it is equally clear that the object of a mystical experience, also satisfies (i)-(iii). Requirement (i) is met with flying colors, since God is the most objective, independent type of being there could be, given his absolute aseity. Not only can (ii) and (iii) be satisfied, we can have overwhelming empirical evidence that they are. Consider this possible course of experience. The heavens become completely dark across the world as a voice from above the clouds says, "I am the Lord they God, and I assure you that these persons (or the same person at different times) had veridical mystical experiences of me. And, in case you doubt me, I will now bring about miracles M, N, and O," all of which immediately follow. To strengthen the case we could imagine that the same message appears over the internet and that there is lightning and snow which that have the sign design of "I am the Lord...". This would make a believer out of me!

The sought for conceptual disanalogy, therefore, is not to be found in

B but in the manner in which *B*'s requirements must be satisfied. First, it will be shown how *B* is satisfied by sense perception and then it will be asked whether there is an analogous way in which mystical experience could satisfy *B*. With regard to sense perception, it is a necessary truth that the perceivers and the objects of their perceptions are housed in a common space-time receptacle in which these objects serve as the common cause, via the different causal chains that link them with these perceivers, of the, for the most part, nomic-type coherence among the contents of these perceptions. This receptacle account explains how objects can exist when not perceived by supplying the needed dimensions in which to house them, thereby satisfying (i). These objects are ultimately individuated by their position in this receptacle, it being a necessary truth that objects of the same kind cannot be spatio-temporally coincident. In order to perform this individuating function for these empirical objects, these dimensions of space and time must not themselves be empirically determined.⁷ The receptacle account also explains how (ii)'s requirement that an object can be perceived by more than one person is met by the different causal chains connecting it with these persons within the receptacle.

The receptacle account also satisfies requirement (iii). The receptacle creates the possibility of there being counter-examples to the principle of the identity of indiscernibles when restricted to fully general properties. Any such property admits of the possibility of multiple instantiations at different regions within the receptacle. And, as a consequence, we are able to distinguish between perceptions that are of numerically one and the same object and those of objects that are only qualitatively similar. In the latter case there are noncoincident objects that are hooked up with different perceptions via different causal chains.

Let us call the receptacle explanation of how requirements (i)-(iii) are satisfied a "dimensional explanation." So far it has been established that it is a necessary conceptual truth that

- C. For an experience to qualify as a sense perception it is required that a dimensional explanation can be given of how its object satisfies requirements (i)-(iii) of *B*.

It would be an egregious piece of linguistic imperialism to require that a mystical experience satisfy *C* if it is to count as perceptual. For the dimensional account in terms of the receptacle's dimensions invokes space, and the object of a mystical experience, God, is not in space. What must be done is to genericize *C* so that it is not required that the dimensions of the receptacle be those of space and time. They can be analogues of space and time that perform the same function that space and time do in explaining how (i)-(iii) are satisfied. This genericized version is

- D. For an experience to qualify as a perception it is required that a dimensional explanation or an analogue to a dimensional explanation can be given of how its object satisfies requirements (i)-(iii) of *B*.

I think it is pretty clear that there is no analogue to a dimensional explanation of how the object of a mystical experience satisfies (i)-(iii) of *B*. As a consequence, mystical experiences fail to be perceptual. And this is the demise of the argument from analogy.

My argument has been subject to many objections. I will attempt to show that they rest on a misunderstanding of it, although the fault is mine for not having written more clearly. Alvin Plantinga, in his *Warranted Christian Belief*,⁸ has referred to my argument, tongue in cheek, as Gale's "killer argument." What Plantinga refutes is not my argument for

A. It is conceptually impossible to perceive God.

but an extended version of my argument for the stronger conclusion *A'*. It is conceptually impossible to perceive or experience God.

He gratuitously burdens me with having the onus of proving *A'* when he writes that Gale "seems to believe or assume that any experiential awareness of God would have to be like *perceptual* awareness of God...[and] he therefore concludes, I think, that it is not possible to have knowledge of God by way of experience" (336). It is not a great feat to refute an extended version of an argument, since every argument admits of such refutation. I make it quite explicit in both the introduction to my argument and the concluding summary that it is an argument only for *A*. "It now will be argued that it is conceptually impossible for there to be a veridical perception of God" (*On the Nature and Existence of God* (326) and "Even though it is impossible to have a veridical experience, that is, nonsensory *perception* of God, it does not follow that an of-God experience could not be caused in the right way and thereby qualify as some kind of *nonperceptual* apprehension of God""(343). In fairness to Plantinga, it must be pointed out that I do make a couple of careless remarks, about which more will be said, that support his strong interpretation of me.

Because he interprets me as defending *A'* rather than the weaker *A*, Plantinga interprets me (on p.339) as defending not

D. For an experience to qualify as a perception it is required that a dimensional explanation or analogue to a dimensional explanation can be given of how its object satisfies requirements (i)-(iii) of *B*.

but the stronger

D'. For an experience to qualify as a perception it is required that a dimensional explanation or an analogue to a dimensional explanation can be given of how its object satisfies requirements (i)-(iii) of *B* and no other sort of explanation can be given of how its object satisfies these requirements.

The crucial difference between *D* and *D'* is that *D'* precludes any

nondimensional explanation of how requirements (i)-(iii) are satisfied whereas *D* allows for it.⁹ I did point out that a nondimensionality type explanation could be given of how God satisfies requirements (i)-(iii), and thus Plantinga and Wainwright are running through open doors in their refutation of me. God can be individuated by his fully general properties, such as being the only creator of the world and a theistic explanation can be given for how he causes there to be by his supernatural will multiple experiences of himself. Furthermore, we could even find out that the latter is the case by the preceding example of hearing the voice from above the clouds.

It seems to me that the most reasonable way to challenge my argument is to deny that *D* is a necessary conceptual truth. Although it is obvious that sense perceptions satisfy *D*, it is not clear that all perceptual experiences must satisfy *D*. I am afraid that the best that I can say in response to this denial of the necessity of *D* is, "Isn't it?" It looks like I am again mired in the modal intuition bowl, in which opponents with rival modal intuitions go back and forth endlessly saying "Tis!" and "Tisn't!".

Even if my argument turns out not to be a "killer argument," it at least has the power to maim, for it significantly deepens the disanalogy between sense and mystical experience by showing that only the former has an object for which there could be a dimensional explanation or an analogue to a dimensional explanation of why its object satisfies requirements (i)-(iii) of *B*. It is yet another acre of the family farm that is given away by the analogical arguer; and, when it is added on to the other acres that have been given away as a result of there being only quite weak mystical analogues to the sensory tests for veridicality, the analogical premise is acceptable only by Bob.

V. Nonperceptual Experiences of God

So far I have argued only that it is impossible or, at least, very dubious that there can be veridical *perceptions* of God. But, what about other types of experience? Could one of them give us a cognitive apprehension of God and thus be a source of knowledge of God's existence? Before considering this, I need, for the good of my soul, to point out a terrible blunder that I made in some of my previous publications. On the one hand, I contended that "even though it is impossible to have a veridical...nonsensory perception of God, it does not follow that an of-God type experience could not be caused by God in the right way and thereby qualify as some kind of nonperceptual apprehension of God" (343). But, on the other hand, I argued that these experiences, like painings, take only a cognate accusative, as witnessed by: "It is the aim of this chapter to supply just such a criterion of objectivity and thus for a verb taking an objective rather than a cognate accusative" (314; see also 326 and 341).; "In order for MPs to qualify as *objective*, not just reliable, it is necessary that their [mystical experience] inputs really be perceptual as advertised" ("Why Alston's Mystical Doxastic Practice Is Subjective" 869). These two claims are incompatible, and it is the latter that must go. I wrongly inferred from the fact that mystical experiences

are not perceptual that they are subjective because I operated with a bogus dichotomy that holds every experience to be either perceptual or subjective, that is, to have a cognate accusative. Mystical experiences might be neither, especially since their accusative, God, is not a cognate accusative. Maybe they could serve as a warrant for the existential beliefs based on them concerning the existence and actions of God in accordance with Plantinga's extended Aquinas/Calvin model of basic warrant. This model, as Plantinga makes clear in his criticism of my argument (336), is not confined to perceptual experiences.

Plantinga had argued with considerable force in *Warrant: the Current Debate* and *Warrant and Proper Function* that what warrants a "basic belief," a belief that is not based on or inferred from another belief, is that it results from the proper functioning of one's cognitive faculties in the right sort of epistemic environment according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth. In these books he confined himself to beliefs based on the "standard package" faculties of sense, memory, introspection, sympathy, and a priori reason. In his monumental *Warranted Christian Belief*, Plantinga argues that it is possible that theistic and, in particular, Christian beliefs have warrant in an analogous way to that in which these standard package beliefs do. If theism is true, then God would want to reveal himself to created persons. Toward this end he implanted in them as part of their original cognitive equipment, along with the cognitive faculties in the standard package, a *sensus divinitatis* that would enable them to form true noninferential beliefs about God's presence, nature, and intentions upon having certain experiences, both perceptual and nonperceptual. Plantinga also introduces a special supernatural process involving the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit by which one is directly caused by God, without any intervening worldly causes, to believe the great things of the Gospel concerning the incarnation, resurrection, and atonement.

Plantinga does not argue that people are in fact warranted in their basic Christian or theistic beliefs by this model — to do so he would have to argue for the existence of God and our possession of a *sensus divinitatis* — only that it is possible that they have basic warrant for these beliefs. Furthermore, they can have such warrant even if the believers are not able to give any evidential or argumentative backing for these beliefs. His argument is based on a rich analogy between the *sensus divinitatis* and the standard package faculties and goes as follows.

10. The *sensus divinitatis* is analogous to the standard package faculties.
11. Some beliefs based on the standard package faculties are basically warranted.
12. Therefore, it is possible that theistic and, in particular, Christian beliefs based upon the *sensus divinitatis* also are basically warranted.

The astute reader, at this point, knows just what moves I am going to make against this argument — attack its analogical premise in just the

same way I did the analogical premise 4 of the doxastic practice version of the analogical argument. The heart of Plantinga's analogy is that we can say of both standard package faculties and the *sensus divinitatis* faculty that they are "functioning properly," as contrasted with suffering from a "disease," being "dysfunctional," "malfunctioning," suffering from a "pathology," or being in "disorder."

Now either we predicate these terms in the same sense of both types of faculties or we do not. On both alternatives the argument fares badly. If these terms are predicated in the same sense, the analogical premise fares badly, suffering from all the disanalogies that were seen to undermine the analogy between SP and MP. There are agreed upon objective tests for the standard package faculties being in a state of dysfunction, pathology, disorder, or malfunctioning. But there are no *sensus divinitatis* analogues to these tests. In regard to basic religious beliefs that are internally instigated by the Holy Spirit, it is obvious that the notion of proper functioning could have no application to them since they are supernaturally caused directly by God. Such instigation, furthermore, is not a faculty but a process and this cannot be said to have any function and therefore cannot be said to malfunction or be subject to a pathology.

Plantinga continually talks about the *sensus divinitatis* in natural law terms; but, whereas for Aristotelian natural law theorists questions concerning an individual's nature and proper mode of functioning are to be answered, at least in part, by empirical inquiry, there is nothing analogous in regard to determining the nature and proper function of the *sensus divinitatis* or for what constitutes a proper way for the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit to occur.

There are further damaging disanalogies between Plantinga's Aquinas/Calvin experience and those in the standard package. Whereas there is universal participation in the very same doxastic practices based on the experiences in the standard package, this is not so for *sensus divinitatis*-based experiences. Plantinga has an explanation for this disanalogy based upon the serious damage that was done to the *sensus divinitatis* as a result of Original Sin, a damage that is repairable only by the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit. But to explain why there is this disanalogy does not explain it away. Another damning disanalogy is that there is no standard package analogue to religious diversity, which issue has already been treated.

The multivocalist horn of my dilemma argument fares no better than did the univocalist one. Plantinga now is to say that these terms ("pathology," etc.) are predicated with a different sense of the two kinds of faculties. This precludes Plantinga's making use of the results established in his two earlier *Warrant* books in his argument for the possibility of having a warranted basic belief that God exists. Thus, basic *sensus divinitatis*-based beliefs can be said to admit of the dysfunction-proper function distinction just as do standard package beliefs, only the tests for the former will be radically different from those for the latter. Whereas the latter are based on empirical tests that are grounded in what is vouchsafed by science, the former will be based on criteria that are internal to the different religious doxastic practices and thus will vary across

these practices. And this is language-game fideism, a most vile doctrine and one that Plantinga's ardent theological realism rightly rejects.¹¹

In conclusion, it must be stressed again that it is possible that there be veridical nonperceptual experiences of God's presence, only they could not give warrant to the beliefs based on them so that they would constitute knowledge. There is a very powerful William James-style will-to-believe argument for it being pragmatically rational for the subjects of mystical experiences to believe both that their experiences are veridical perceptions and that MP is a reliable objective doxastic practice, but this is a story for another paper.¹²

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NOTES

1. See in particular: William Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); William Wainwright, *Mysticism, A Study of Its Nature, Cognitive Value, and Moral Implications* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981); Gary Guting, *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982); Jerome Gellman, *Experience of God and the Rationality of Theistic Belief* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), and *Mystical Experience of God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001); Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1991). References to these books will be made within parentheses in the body of the paper.

2. Jerome Gellman's argument in *Mystical Experience of God* (17) is based on Swinburne's Principle of Credulity, but it is unclear whether he gives it full generality and thus whether his argument is analogical.

3. The publications in question are: Chapter 8 of *On the Nature and Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); "Why Alston's Mystical Doxastic Practice Is Subjective," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 4 (1994), along with Alston's response; "The Overall Argument of Alston's *Perceiving God*," *Religious Studies* 30 (1994), along with Alston's response; "Swinburne on Religious Experience," in *Reason and the Christian Religion: Essays in Honour of Richard Swinburne*, ed. A. Padgett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); A Critical Study of Keith Yandell's *The Epistemology of Religious Experience, Faith and Philosophy* (1995); and "A Response to My Critics," *Philo* 6 (2003).

4. "Response to Critics," *Religious Studies* 30 (1994), pp. 174-5.

5. "Gale on Religious Experience," *Philo* 6 (2003).

6. For an insightful account of this see William Alston, "The Distinctiveness of the Epistemology of Religious Belief," in *The Rationality of Theism*, eds. G. Bruntrup and R. Tacelli (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999).

7. For the full details on this see my *Problems of Negation and Non-Being, The American Philosophical Quarterly*, Monograph 10 (1975), reprinted in my collected paper, *God and Metaphysics* (Amherst: Prometheus Press, 2004).

8. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 335.

9. Wainwright also so interprets me. *Op. Cit.*, p. 160. Gellman, on the other hand, when he lists the key propositions in my argument, fails to mention *D. Op. Cit.*, p. 40.

10. For a detailed account of exactly how his argument is analogical see my

"Alvin Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief*," *Philo* 4 (2001).

11. See Plantinga's trenchant objections to fideism in his "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality*, ed. by Plantinga and Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, In.: the University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 87-9.

12. For the full details I refer the reader to my *The Divided Self of William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), an abridged version of which, *The Philosophy of William James: an Introduction*, is appear in September of 2004.