

1 INTRODUCTION

In this essay, we will look at whether religious experiences give evidence for the existence of God. I will discuss my fundamental assessments which would be, what do we consider “evidence” when approaching this question? Are we using reason to approach the right procedure to get the solution to this question? Furthermore, how do we reach the evidence to supply proof to rational beliefs via supernatural testimony? I will comment on the quandary that this subject provides, as well as the essential topics that must be considered when investigating.

I will evaluate any prejudice present in the methodical approach taken to these supernatural encounters when it comes to testimonials of the supernatural, demonstrating the necessity for a different evidential foundation when erroneously connecting natural evidence to a supernatural encounter. Subsequently, touching on the fundamental topic of whether supernatural experiences may serve as evidence and the ensuing method we must employ to separate objective evidence from supernatural testimony.

In order to provide a type of reasoned acquired evidence, I will also explore the associated traits and aspects of religious/supernatural experiences. Throughout my essay, I often use the term I call *related accumulative force*. ‘Related’ being things that are in connection to one another. ‘Accumulative,’ to elaborate a vast number of comparable accounts, that which continues to expand in relative connection. Finally, ‘force,’ that of being something with significant influence.

2 NATURAL VS. SUPERNATURAL EVIDENCE

Experiences can give evidence for a variety of claims; it is how humans naturally obtain information and knowledge. Although the supernatural explanation differs from the natural account, we should approach both logically in the same way. Testimonies show what was seen or perceived, whether it was a private or public incident, and if there is enough ‘related accumulative force’, it is the basis of what we claim to know. If supernatural experience cannot be investigated by naturalistic evidence, and supernatural experiences have related accumulative force, why should we not embrace supernatural experience for understanding as we would any other perceptual evidence?

A basic allegation against supernatural experience via testimonial tales may be like that of the sasquatch; if we have no proof (even though these testimonies appear to have a ‘related accumulative force’), such testimonies must be wrong and dismissed. A testimony with a lack of evidence may be discredited, but only if such testimony is dependent on the evidence on which it is based. I would argue that supernatural experiences cannot be handled in the same fashion as natural ones, since it is commonly based on a different type of evidence.

In relation, sasquatch sightings may be situations of basic misperceptions; they may have felt they saw something they didn't, which may be the truth, for either the natural or supernatural testimony. However, one testimony falls within what can be investigated by natural evidence, whilst the other does not. These testimonies must be addressed in terms of the evidence on which they are based. I would argue that the same is true of supernatural testimony; a category of that which the supernatural relies on, one beyond or distinct from natural examination, is required.

3 COURT OF LAW ANALOGY

Let us consider testimonial experiences from the perspective of a court of law. Testimonies are often all a judge must use. In addition, there may be evidence alongside to support that testimony. In fact, I believe it is a straightforward answer relating to the fundamental question: are testimonies proof? Indubitably so, especially in the case when you add 'related accumulative force' to the equation.

Due to assuming that we can assess supernatural experience using natural evidence, (within the system we use to prove that evidence,) in this hypothetical court of law we would approach this supposed supernatural experience—i.e., testimony—much more skeptically than one that relies on natural evidence. Hypothetically, if we had 12 people whom all had similar experiences and thus testimonies concerning a natural experience, it would be viewed as extremely substantial evidence for a case based solely on testimony. However, due to our flawed approach, even 12 supernatural testimonies would likely be dismissed as simple misperceptions, which I believe is pushed by the assumed need for natural evidence they misguidedly assign.

This approach to a universal category of solely natural evidence considered when referring to something that is beyond the natural, I would suggest, is faulty; we must consider a distinct system of evidence and knowledge. Natural testimony is supported by natural evidence, while supernatural testimony is backed by supernatural evidence; both of which are to be assumed as *rational belief*, as with any related testimony.

4 EVIDENCE OF GOD

Now that we have assessed that supernatural experience must include a separate counterpart of supernatural evidence, I have taken two very important steps. First, is the weakening of arguments against supernatural experience: those which point to only scientifically comprehensible natural evidence. This approach I believe is erroneous, because it assigns evidence to a testimony on which it does not solely rely. Secondly, I have shown the requirement for a different category of evidence, that which cannot be exclusively appraised from natural evidence. Instead, it must be treated rationally as we recover truth from natural testimonial experiences.

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RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES: A RATIONAL GOD

However, just because we evaluate testimonial evidence in a different category doesn't mean we abandon reason. We cannot be purely optimistic in treating supernatural experiences as facts to be examined by this undefined 'supernatural evidence.' Just as I said before, there are going to be cases of misperceptions, and untrustworthy witnesses, as would be the case for scenarios of normal testimony.

Continuing, I believe everyone would agree that religious experience falls into the supernatural category, which relies on evidence that goes beyond natural explanation. If these supernatural testimonies are to be viewed as something that is *rationally believable* through the process of 'related accumulative force,' then subsequently religious testimonies must be approached as *possible* evidence.

Speaking of the categorical resemblance of the supernatural and religious, I'm sure you've discovered that, while debating, I prefer the phrase supernatural evidence for a few reasons I feel are worth discussing. To begin, supernatural evidence extends far beyond just religious experiences, including spiritual testimonials, among other things, (ghost sightings, etc.) I believe it is critical to recognize the major 'related accumulative force' when generalizing all supernatural narratives. It is less discriminating in terms of religious or non-religious affiliation; many non-theistic persons have experienced supernatural experiences that may have a comparable force to that of a theistic person. When joined together, it appears to have far greater strength.

However, while these supernatural accounts can be relatively coherent within their religion from a theistic standpoint, the same cannot be true from a non-theistic viewpoint of exclusively naturalistic scientific understanding. This, in my opinion, strengthens the case that if there is accumulated power pointing to supernatural experiences and narratives, there is truth to be expressed within that testimonial evidence.

Continuing, I will try to paraphrase my argument so far before going further:

Experiences cause testimonies, testimonies verify experiences, reliable related accumulative testimonies i.e., experiences verify truths, truths are subject to rational belief, rational beliefs require evidence, evidence is rational proof.

Now that the structure of religious or supernatural experiences has been demonstrated to be reachable by possible rational belief, we may analyze if those linked experiences can supply *supernatural evidence* to reach rational proof of that of a God.

There are several routes we may take when analyzing religious experiences in relation to proof of a God: from near-death experiences, medical miracles, fundamental religious experiences, life-changing events, etc. What I'm primarily interested in are the connected features and qualities that we might evaluate in order to provide 'related accumulative force' to these testimonial arguments. Due to the lack of a formal process for evaluating these supernatural accounts, I feel it is the strongest feasible method to look for this 'related accumulative force,' which as previously indicated, presents us with considerable *rational belief* to employ in an evidential fashion.

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RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES: A RATIONAL GOD

There are often underlying commonalities in each of these forms of supernatural encounters. In near-death experiences, for example, most people have an out-of-body scenario where they look down on themselves. Typically, they see a great light, with family members meeting them, some are hailed by angels, and some claim to have spoken with God himself. Because of the intense warmth and joy, most often do not want to return to their bodies. This narrative appears to follow with enormous 'related accumulative force,' not just through people, but also across countries and civilizations. Of course, not everyone observed the same thing, but all these experiences have similar qualities and attributes.

The same is true for people who have had more fundamental religious experiences, people whose lives have been completely altered, where they feel and appear to know without a doubt that it is the result of a God. A perfect example would be that of Paul the Apostle within Christian theology, which I would consider the height of documented transformed lives. Within the Book of Acts,¹ where he goes by Saul of Tarsus, he has a religious experience on the road to Damascus where he sees and speaks to Jesus. This was a man who was a Pharisee within ancient Jerusalem, a murderer of Christians who vowed to destroy the Christian Church. Because of a life-changing religious encounter, from killing Christians, he became the author of two-thirds of the New Testament in the Bible. He also steered the early Christian Church toward proliferation inside the ancient Roman Empire.

Or we may take a closer look at William J. Seymour, and the Azusa Street Revival.² This is an instance of religious encounters that took place in the early 1900s; it is a remarkable example to use when referring to 'related accumulative force' via testimonies. Groups of people experienced speaking in tongues, while others witnessed healing miracles and various religious experiences. Whilst reflecting, something that stood out to me was that this was at a period when bigotry and segregation were pervasive in America, that said, "more than twenty nationalities reportedly participated in the revival, including large numbers of Blacks, Whites, and Mexicans,"³ some of whom had traveled great distances, each who observed and attested in unequivocal agreeance to these accounts. Yet another ideal illustration of connected supernatural encounters that skepticism has dismissed.

We must consider what may potentially transform a person's complete existence in the manner of the Apostle Paul, or those whose lives have been entirely turned around by something they could only ascribe to God. You could suggest that it is all in their heads and that they have persuaded themselves to change, that these miracles are the result of pure chance, or is that really the cause? Or rather, are we simply trying to explain and supply natural proof for a supernatural occurrence?

¹ Canterbury Ed., *Authorized (King James) Version Bible*, (Schuyler Bible Publishers, 2016) Acts.

² Michael Corcoran, 'How a humble preacher ignited the Pentecostal fire', *Cox News Services*, https://web.archive.org/web/20111207001950/http://www.statesman.com/search/content/shared/news/nation/stories/0220_PENECOSTAL.html [accessed 22 December 2022].

³ Gastón Espinosa, 'Tongues and Healing at the Azusa Street Revival', *Religions of the United States in Practice*, Volume 2, ed. by Colleen McDannell, (Princeton University Press, 2001) pp. 217–23. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv346rkb.23>, [accessed 21 December 2022].

5 CONCLUSION

There are reports of supernatural experiences throughout history as far back as we can go, not only in the present. Although they may not always be experienced in the same way, these accounts tend to have common definitional features and characteristics. When we look at the variety of religious experiences and testimonies, we see a recurring pattern that unmistakably indicates a God.

I would suggest that our understanding of what we consider to be evidence is founded on a narrow framework. I believe it is necessary to admit the errancy in attempting to explain away supernatural explanations by fitting them into a one-size-fits-all methodology. A different, rational method of *supernatural* critique must be employed instead. I worry that in our pride, we have placed ourselves in a situation that makes us ignorant to the possibility of more, more than what we can see, feel, or infer through study and other forms of natural exploration. Humans strive for a thorough comprehension of the cosmos in which we live: we refer to what we can grasp, and we attribute what science can explain as logic and reason. I would argue, true rationality comes from those who can perceive the inevitability of layers to this complex existence, to consider processes that we can pursue separate from natural inference.

Every day, people's lives are changed by religious experiences and encounters with something described as greater than themselves. If the millions of testimonies and experiences that lead to a God are to be taken as proof through 'related accumulative force,' then they should be viewed in the same way as the testimonials of the very people who write the history books which we study as factual.

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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